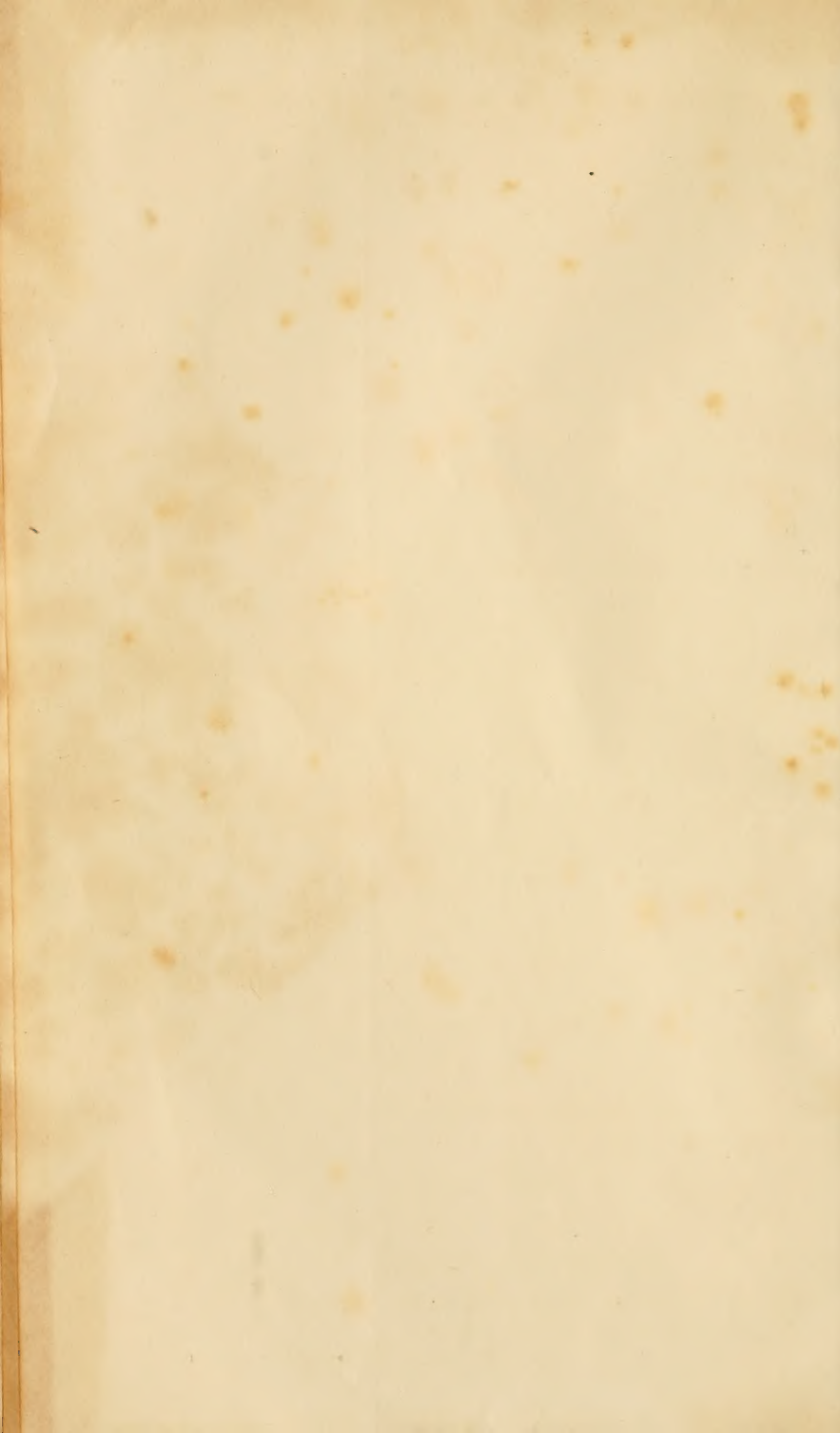




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HELPS TO COMPOSITION;

OR,

SIX HUNDRED

SKELETONS OF SERMONS;

SEVERAL

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SERMONS PREACHED
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY:

BY THE

REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M. A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not
to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* ST. PAUL.

VOL. II.

THE THIRD EDITION.

London:

Printed by Luke Hansard & Sons,

TOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, IN THE STRAND.

1815.

Luke Hansard & Sons,
near Lincoln's-Inn Fields, London.

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PRINCETON

THEOLOGICAL
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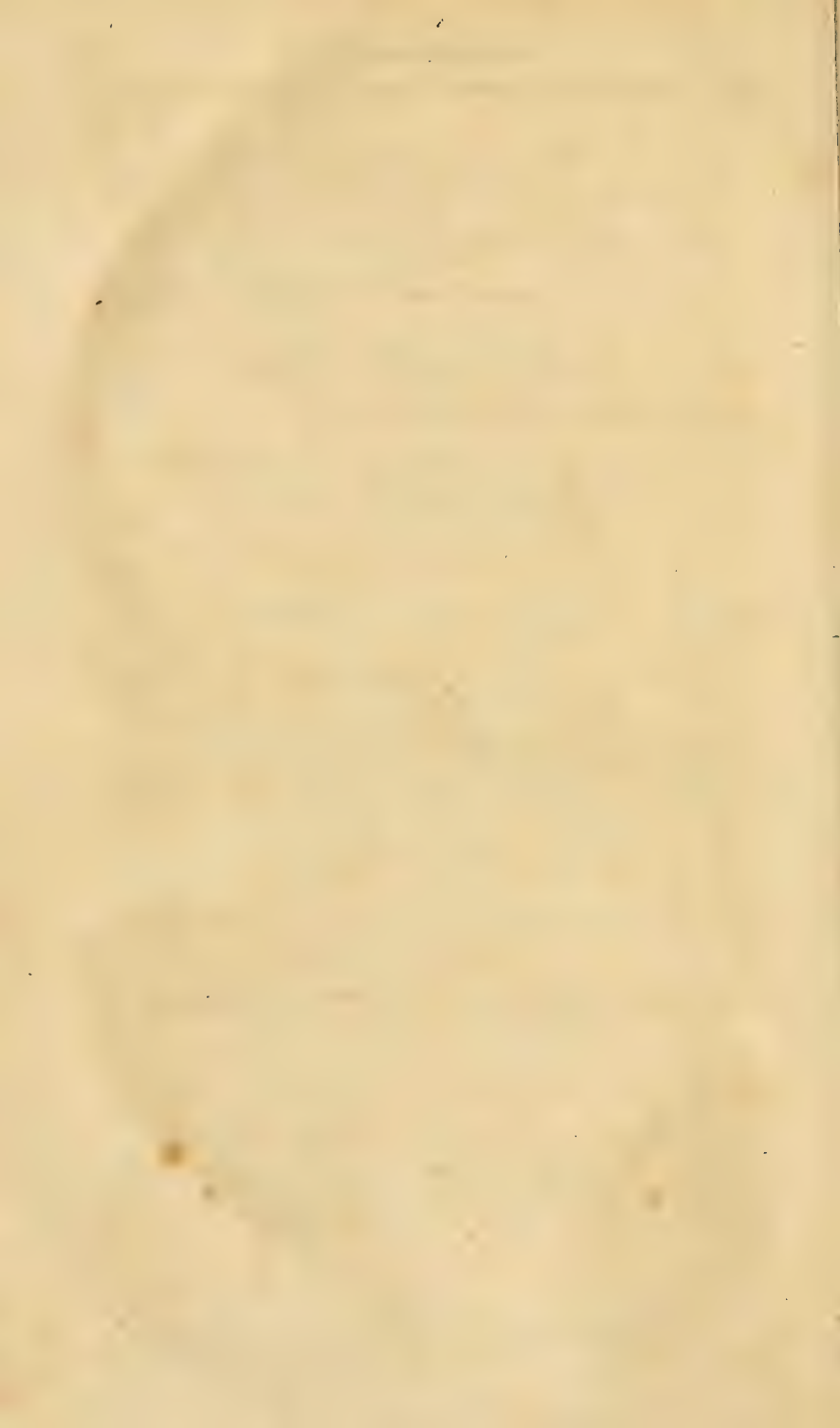
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^a These Sermons are for a very obvious reason compressed into as small a space as possible; except that on Ver. 9, 10. which is given at full length, exactly as it was preached before the University.

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THE TYPES.

CL. THE NATURE AND USE OF THE TYPES.

Col. ii. 17. *Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.*

MAN is naturally addicted to superstition; partly from a consciousness of his needing mercy from God, and partly from a desire of reconciling himself to God by some meritorious services of his own. The Jewish œconomy had rather a tendency to foster this disposition, inasmuch as it prescribed many rites and ceremonies as means of acceptance with God. But from these the Gospel has set us free; and, in so doing, has introduced a more free and liberal spirit. Nevertheless, even under the light of the Gospel, we are prone to indulge the same servile desires, and to prefer a yoke of bondage to the freedom of God's children. Such was the case with many even in the apostolic age. St. Paul is cautioning the Colossians against two sorts of teachers, who were endeavouring to mislead them; against the advocates for Heathen philosophy^a, and against the Judaizing brethren, who insisted on the observance of the Mosaic ritual^b. In opposition to the latter of these, he bids the Christians to assert their liberty from the observances of the ceremonial law, *that* being, in fact, no more than a shadow, of which they now possessed the substance.

We shall take occasion from his words to shew

I. The nature of the types

The scripture sets before us several kinds of types

[Christians are in general but little acquainted with the types: yet the scripture abounds with them, and mentions various kinds of them. They may be reduced to three classes; *natural*,

^a Verse 8.

^b Verse 16.

natural, *historical*, and *legal*. The *natural* are such as may be seen in the works of nature (in this view, the creation of the universe is a type of the new creation, which the regenerate soul experiences through the word and spirit of God;) the *historical* are such as Joshua, David and others; and the *legal* are all the ceremonies of the Jewish law.]

These are shadowy representations of Christ and his benefits

[All of them relate to Christ in some view or other; either to his person and offices, or to his church and the benefits he confers upon it. They are the shadow, whereof he is the substance: and as a shadow represents, though but faintly, the image of the substance, so they portray, though in a very indistinct manner, the character and work of Christ.]

Nevertheless they must have been instituted of God for this purpose

[We are not at liberty to consider every common similitude as a type, or to launch into the boundless ocean of conjecture: in some instances indeed observations drawn from analogy may be almost as convincing as the declarations of God himself: but it is safest to adhere to those points, which scripture has determined for us: in them we are in no danger of erring, and therefore can speak with precision and authority. Nor should we ever forget, that, as those things alone are sacraments to *us* which God has appointed to be so, so those things alone were types to the Jewish church, which God instituted for that express purpose.]

The text, in connexion with the context, leads us further to declare

II. Their use

God would not have appointed them, if they had not been beneficial to his church. But with respect to the Jewish and the Christian church, we shall, as they subserved different purposes, notice their use to each:

1. To the Jews

[*The types served to shew them what sort of a person their Messiah should be:* for though (as was before noticed) the notions acquired from a shadow are very indistinct, yet it conveys some idea of the substance, from which it is projected. *They further kept up the expectation of him in the world.* The first promise had been nearly forgotten; and most probably the repetition of it would have made but a transient impression: but the multitude of observances, daily repeated, and continually directing the eyes of the worshippers to him, could not fail of exciting a general, and increasing expectation of his

his advent. *They moreover led the people to exercise faith on him.* Every intelligent worshipper must see that the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin; and therefore (as we are sure Abraham, David and others did) the devout Jews must look through the ordinances to Christ, and rely on him who *was to come*, just as we rely on him who *is come*.]

2. To us

[The types are of signal use to *us*, in that *they testify of Christ as the person promised* from the foundation of the world, and *prefigured in the whole of the Mosaic ritual*. When we compare the account of Christ in the *New Testament* with the various ordinances of the *Old*, we see how impossible it was that such a coincidence of character should ever happen, but by the express ordination and appointment of God. But they are of further use to us also, in that *they wonderfully illustrate the character of Jesus*. We could not have formed any adequate idea of Christ's work and offices, if we had not been assisted by the typical institutions: *these* serve to embody our notions, and to make them, like a picture, visible to the eyes of men, and therefore intelligible to the meanest capacity: whereas, if we could not thus invest them, as it were, with matter, we could only offer to our hearers some abstract ideas, which, after all, would convey but little meaning, and leave no abiding impression.]

INFER

1. How great are the privileges of the Christian church!

[The Jews were oppressed with a yoke of ceremonies, which they were not able to bear, the import of which they could very faintly discern, and the observance of which yielded no permanent satisfaction to their consciences^c: but we are freed from that yoke, and enjoy a dispensation of light, and liberty. Let us be thankful for our privilege, and "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free."]

2. What spirituality of mind should we possess!

[Our superior privileges doubtless demand a correspondent pre-eminence in our spirit and conduct. If we are "no longer servants but sons," we ought to manifest a filial affection towards God, and a delight in his service. But do not many of the pious Jews reproach us? O let us walk worthy of our high vocation, and shew forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light^d.]

^c Heb. x. 1, 2.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 9.

CII. ADAM A TYPE OF CHRIST.

1 Cor. xv. 22. *As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

THE fall of man in Adam, and his recovery in Christ, comprehend the whole circle of divine truth: every part of the revealed will of God is so connected with these two doctrines, that all must stand or fall together. Our death implies the former of them; and our resurrection the latter. Hence St. Paul, proving the doctrine of the resurrection, adverts to our fall in Adam as an acknowledged truth, and draws a parallel between that and our recovery in Christ.

We shall

I. Establish the points mentioned in the text

Nothing can be more certain than that “in Adam all died”

[The penalty of eating the forbidden fruit was death, death temporal, spiritual, eternal: and, on the very day that Adam fell, the threatened punishment was inflicted on him, so far, at least, as could consist with God’s purposes towards the world at large: the seeds of death were implanted in his body; a spiritual death seized upon his soul; and everlasting death awaited him, unless divine mercy should interpose to deliver him from it. Nor was this a matter which concerned him alone; it involved both him and all his posterity, insomuch that all the human race fell in him, and became obnoxious to temporal, spiritual, eternal death. The very words of the text prove this; yea, they prove it more strongly than any mere assertion could do; because they state it as an allowed fact; and make it the foundation of a most important comparison.]

Nor is it less clear that “in Christ shall all be made alive”

[Christ was sent into the world to repair the ruins of the fall. By his Spirit he “quickens the souls that were dead in trespasses and sins;” and by his obedience unto death he reconciles them to their offended God. It is true, that the death of the body is still inflicted upon all: but this ceases to be a punishment to God’s people, and must rather be considered as a blessing: “To whomsoever it is Christ to live, it is *gain* to die^a,” and the body which is consigned for a while to its native dust, shall at last be raised again “in the likeness of Christ’s glorious body,” to participate the blessedness of its kindred soul.

^a Phil. i. 21.

soul. All this is restored to us in and through Christ, who on this very account calls himself "the resurrection and the life ^b."]

But both these points will be yet further confirmed, while we

II. Shew the correspondence between them

If it be asked, *How* did we die in Adam? and, *How* do we live in Christ? we answer;

1. By means of a fœderal relation to them

[Neither Adam nor Christ are to be regarded as private individuals, but as the representatives of all mankind. Adam was the covenant head of the whole world: the covenant was made with him for himself and them: had he fulfilled the conditions imposed upon him, there is reason to believe, that the benefits of his obedience would have descended to his latest posterity, who beyond a doubt are involved in the punishment of his disobedience. The death of infants is a decisive evidence, that the sin of Adam is imputed to them; for death is the punishment of sin; and a righteous God will not inflict punishment, where it is not in some way or other merited; therefore they, who have never committed actual sin, and yet are punished, must have guilt imputed to them in some other way, or, in other words, must be chargeable with Adam's guilt. This is the Apostle's own statement; and his conclusion is irresistible^c.

Christ in the same manner was the head and representative of the elect world: what he did and suffered, he did and suffered in our place and stead; "he, who knew no sin, became sin for us, that we, who had no righteousness, might become the righteousness of God in him ^d." St. Paul himself not only asserts this, but draws at considerable length this very parallel between Adam and Christ, in order to evince, that, so far from being injured by this constitution of things, we have our loss in Adam far overbalanced by the remedy which God has given us in Christ ^e.]

2. By the communication of their nature to us

[Adam was formed after God's image, pure and holy; but he begat children in his own fallen image, corrupt and sinful^f. Nor could he do otherwise; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean ^g?" The fountain being polluted, the streams that issued from it could not but participate of its malignant qualities. Hence it is that we are conceived in sin and born in iniquity^h; and that all, the apostles themselves not excepted, "are by nature children of wrath ⁱ."

Thus

^b John xi. 25.

^c Rom. v. 12, 14.

^d 2 Cor. v. 21.

^e Rom. v. 15—21.

^f Gen. i. 26, 27. and v. 3.

^g Job xiv. 4.

^h Ps. li. 5.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 3.

Thus Christ also imparts his nature to those whom he has chosen to share his benefits. He makes them "partakers of a divine nature^k," and transforms them into "the divine image in righteousness and true holiness^l:" "He himself lives in them^m;" and thus renders them meet for eternal life, even for the inheritance of the saints in lightⁿ.

It is, however, proper to observe, that though *all* are said to die in Adam, and to be made alive in Christ, the benefits received from Christ do not extend to all that are affected by Adam's fall; the word "*all*" must, in the latter clause, be taken in a more limited sense, and import that, as they, who were represented by Adam, and are partakers of *his* nature, die in him; so they, who were represented by Christ, and are partakers of *his* nature, shall live in him.]

INFER

1. How much of Christ may be seen even in the character of Adam himself!

[Adam is expressly said to be "*a figure of him that was to come*;" and Christ, in reference to him, is called the second Adam^p. Both of them were the representatives of their respective seeds; but, blessed be God! not with the same success: the one destroyed, the other saves, the souls committed to him. Let us then renounce, as far as possible, our connexion with him who has brought condemnation upon us, and seek an union with him, "through whose obedience we may be made righteous."]

2. Of what importance is it to understand and receive the gospel!

[It is only by the gospel that we can be acquainted with the work of Christ, and obtain an interest in him: if we know him not, we remain under all the disadvantages of the fall. To dispute about this doctrine is to no purpose: we are dead in Adam, whether we will believe it or not; nor can we obtain life, but in and through Christ. Let us then not reject the gracious overtures of Christ, but turn to him in this our time of acceptance, this day of our salvation.]

3. How thankful should we be for God's distinguishing mercy to the sinners of mankind!

[When angels fell, there was no Saviour provided for them: they were punished for the first offence, and will remain monuments of God's indignation to all eternity: but *we* are spared, yea, are saved by the mediation of God's co-equal Son^q. Let heaven and earth praise him! and let every tongue *now*, as surely we shall hereafter, adore him for such unmerited, incomprehensible love!]

^k 2 Pet. i. 4.

^l Eph. iv. 24.

^m Gal. ii. 20.

ⁿ Col. i. 12.

^o Τύπος, Rom. v. 14.

^p 1 Cor. xv. 45—47.

^q Heb. ii. 16.

CIII. ABEL'S SACRIFICE AND CHRIST'S COMPARED.

Heb. xii. 22, 24. *Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

AS the Christian dispensation differs widely from that of Moses as to the manner in which it was promulgated, so does it most essentially differ with respect to the spirit and temper which it is calculated to produce in the minds of men. The terrors of Mount Sinai were suited to impress the Jews with a servile fear; as their whole system of rites and ceremonies was, to keep them under bondage. But the mild genius of the gospel introduces us at once to peace and liberty. In the passage before us the apostle exemplifies this remark in many particulars; the last of which demands our attention at this time. We propose to shew

I. The efficacy of Abel's blood

By "the blood of Abel" we are not to understand *his own* blood, but the blood of his sacrifice

[The generality of commentators indeed explain this as relating to Abel's blood, which cried for vengeance against his murderous brother^a. But to commend the blood of Christ *in this view*, would indeed be no commendation at all. The history of Abel informs us, that he offered one of the firstlings of his flock *in addition to* the same kind of offering as Cain brought^b, manifesting thereby not merely his obligations to God as a creature, but his conscious guilt as a sinner, and his faith in that Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world^c. That sacrifice of his was honoured with very peculiar tokens of God's acceptance^d; and may therefore fitly be referred to as illustrative of the sacrifice of Christ.]

It spake to him that offered it very excellent things

[Had not the marks of God's favour been such as were most desirable, Cain would not have so cruelly envied his brother the attainment of them. But they manifestly declared to Abel the acceptance of his person, and an approbation of his service. What could be more delightful than such a testimony to a pious soul? Had life itself been the price of such a blessing, it had been well bestowed.]

But

^a Gen. iv. 10.

[and Abel.

^b This is well proved by Dr. Kennicott, in his dissertation on Cain

^c Heb. xi. 4.

^d Perhaps fire might be sent from heaven to consume the sacrifice.

See instances of this, Lev. ix. 24. 1 Kin. xviii. 38. 1 Chron. xxi. 26. and 2 Chron. vii. 1.

But the excellence of Abel's sacrifice is far surpassed by
 II. The superior efficacy of Christ's

The blood of Christ is here, as in other places^c, called
 "the blood of sprinkling"

[There is in this place an allusion to the sprinkling of blood on the book and on the people, when God made his covenant with the Jewish nation^f. The blood of Christ is sprinkled upon us, when we enter into covenant with God; and it binds God, if we may so say, to fulfil to us his promises, while it binds us on the other hand to obey his precepts.]

This speaks to us incomparably better things than the blood of Abel

[Great as the expressions of God's love to Abel were in consequence of the sacrifice which that righteous man had offered, they were not to be compared with those which we receive through Christ. There was no inherent virtue in his sacrifice; its efficacy was derived from the relation it bore to Christ; and the blessings, enjoyed by means of it, were rather typical than real. The continuance of God's favour to him was to be secured only by a constant repetition of the same sacrifices; nor could he obtain a full and perfect peace of conscience even by their means^g: but Christ, by his one sacrifice of himself, has perfected for ever them that are sanctified^h. Besides, whatever Abel's sacrifice spake, it spake to him alone: whereas the blood of Christ speaks to the whole world, and proclaims acceptance to all who will trust in it for salvation. Thus, while the good things which the blood of Abel spake, were only *typical, temporary, and personal*, those, which the blood of Christ speaks, are *real, permanent, and universal*.]

Nor will *our* concern in this matter appear unimportant, if we consider

III. The interest which the believer has in it

Every believer "comes to" this blood of sprinkling

[The efficacy of the Redeemer's blood is not a matter of speculation, but of experience, to every true Christian. As Moses and the Israelites "came to" Mount Sinai in order to make a covenant with God, so do we come to the blood of sprinkling: *they* came as persons redeemed by God out of the house of bondage; *we* as redeemed from death and hell: *they* came to take God as their God, and to give up themselves to him as his people; and *we* come with precisely the same view: *they* offered sacrifices and were sprinkled with the blood, in token that they deserved to die, and could be cleansed only
 by

^c 1 Pet. i. 2. ^f Compare Exod. xxiv. 6—8. with Heb. ix. 18—22.

^g Heb. ix. 9.

^h Heb. x. 14.

by the blood of atonement ; and *we* come in the same manner to the blood of Christ : *they* looked through the typical sacrifices to him who was in due time to be offered ; and *we* look to him, who in due time was offered for our sins upon the cross.]

In coming thus to Christ we experience all the efficacy of his blood

[Were we afar off? We are brought nigh to Godⁱ : Were we enemies to God? We are reconciled to him^k : Were we condemned for our iniquities? We are now justified^l : Were our minds filled with a sense of guilt and a dread of punishment? Our hearts are now sprinkled from an evil conscience^m, and enjoy peace with Godⁿ : Were we strangers to communion with God? We now have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus^o : Were we enslaved by evil habits? We are now purged from dead works to serve the living God^p : Did a sentence of eternal misery await us? We now look forward to the fruits of an eternal redemption^q. Such is the interest that the Christian has in the blood of sprinkling ; and in this sense it may be said of every believer, that he is "come to" it.]

APPLICATION

1. Let us inquire whether we be indeed come to this blood of sprinkling

[It is not every nominal Christian, that has approached God in this way: "all are not Israel who are of Israel"—The outward form indeed *which* was observed by Moses is not required under the Christian dispensation; nor need we feel his terror, in order to obtain his comforts: but we must seriously draw nigh to God, sprinkling ourselves, as it were, with the blood of Christ, and professing our entire reliance upon that for our acceptance with Him. Yea, we must go to God in the very spirit and temper in which Abel offered his sacrifice; not merely thanking Him with Pharisaic pride, as Cain may be supposed to have done; but smiting on our breasts like the Publican, and imploring mercy for Christ's sake. Have we done *this*? Or rather, are we doing it yet daily? On this depends our happiness both in this world, and in the world to come. If God at this moment gives us the witness of his spirit in our consciences that this is indeed our experience, let us rejoice in such a testimony, and be thankful for it. But if our consciences condemn us, oh! let us delay no longer, but instantly sprinkle ourselves with that precious blood, on account of which he will speak peace unto our souls.]

2. Let

ⁱ Eph. ii. 13.

^m Heb. x. 22.

^p Heb. ix. 14.

^k Col. i. 20.

ⁿ Rom. v. 1.

^q Ib. ver. 12, 15.

^l Rom. v. 9.

^o Heb. x. 19.

2. Let us endeavour to fulfil the obligations which this blood entails upon us

[When Moses sprinkled the Jews, and read to them the book of the covenant, they said, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient:" O that there may be in us also such a heart, such a heart, I mean, not merely to promise, but to perform our promises! Certainly this is the end for which Christ shed his blood; he died, not merely to bring us to the enjoyment of privileges, but to lead us to the performance of our duties; "he gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Let us then strive to walk worthy of our high calling; and let "the love of Christ constrain us to live unto him, who died for us and rose again."]

CIV. NOAH'S ARK A TYPE OF CHRIST.

1 Pet. iii. 21. *The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth now save us.*

GOD has marked the necessity of holiness no less by the dispensations of his providence than by the declarations of his grace. His destroying of the whole world for their iniquity, evinced, as strongly as any thing could, that sin should never go unpunished, and that the righteous only should be saved. In this view St. Peter introduces the mention of that well-attested fact, and declares that the salvation, experienced by Noah in the ark, was typical of that which we experience by Christ, and into which we are brought by our baptism. The text is by no means free from difficulties: to render it as intelligible as we can, we shall consider

I. The typical salvation here referred to

God had determined to overwhelm the world with a deluge

[Though there had been so few generations upon earth, that Noah's own father (Lamech) had been contemporary with Adam for sixty years, and lived till within five years of the flood, so that Noah, and the people of that generation, had, for no less than six hundred years together, received instruction only at second hand from Adam himself, yet had "all flesh corrupted their way," insomuch that "God repented that he had made man," and resolved to destroy him from off the face of the earth.]

But

But for the preservation of the righteous he instructed Noah to make an ark

[This vessel was not constructed according to man's device, but by the special direction of God himself. To the eyes of man it doubtless seemed an absurd attempt : but "the foolishness of God is wiser than man;" and the event justified the hopes and expectations of Noah.]

In the mean time he called the people to repentance by the ministry of Noah

[God exercised forbearance towards them 120 years. But they "received his grace in vain." And the means used for their salvation only ripened them for destruction.]

When the appointed time was come, he ordered Noah and his family to go into the ark

[The symptoms of the flood did not yet appear ; but these favourites of heaven were to condemn the world, not in word only, but in deed. By manifesting their faith, their fear, and their obedience, they were practically to condemn the world's unbelief, security, and disobedience^a. And, upon their entrance into the ark, "God shut them in" with his own hand, that the door might be secure against the violence of the wind and waves.]

Then the waters, that destroyed all the world besides, bore up them in perfect safety

[Every other refuge *now* proved vain. The unbelievers found to their cost the truth of God's threatenings. Their numbers did not screen them from his judgments. Nor was the fewness of the elect any bar to their acceptance and salvation. They rose, while others sank in the mighty waters. Nor, if any cleaved to the ark, did that avail them. The very builders of the ark perished. They, and they only, who were in the ark, were made the monuments of saving mercy.]

This history being altogether typical, we shall consider II. The correspondent salvation which we enjoy

Baptism is spoken of in the text as the *antitype*^b, of which Noah's flood was the type. But we apprehend the apostle's meaning to be, that Noah's salvation in the ark was typical of our salvation under the Christian dispensation^c. This subject will be best understood, not by drawing

^a Heb. xi. 7.

^b Ἀντίτυπον.

^c The relative ὃ cannot agree with κτεῖνες, which is feminine, but must agree with ὁδὸς, or rather perhaps with the whole sentence ; this last construction renders the sense of the passage incomparably more clear ; on which account it is here preferred.

drawing the parallel between the flood and baptism, or between the ark and Christ, but by exhibiting *the fact* of our salvation as corresponding with that of Noah.

God has determined to punish the world with an everlasting destruction

[His word bears frequent and most undeniable testimony to this solemn truth^d — —]

But he has prepared a Saviour for those who repent and turn unto him

[Human sagacity never could have devised a way of saving sinners consistently with the honour of God's perfections. But God has sent and qualified his only-begotten Son, that, through him, all who believe might be justified from all things. And though salvation through the death of Christ be "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet to them that are called to partake of it, it has invariably proved the power of God and the wisdom of God^e.]

Ever since the method of salvation has been announced to the world, God has been inviting sinners to embrace it

[The first plank of this ark was laid, if we may so speak, when God promised to Adam a "Seed, who should bruise the serpent's head."—From that day, it has been erecting visibly in the world, in order that, while men were warned of their danger, they might see their remedy: and now, for nearly six thousand years, has God exercised forbearance towards an impenitent and unbelieving world.]

By "baptism" we embark, as it were, on board this divinely constructed vessel

[When we are baptized into the faith of Christ, we profess our persuasion that "there is salvation in no other," and our desire "to be found in him," not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith in him^f. Thus we come to be *in him*, as a branch in the vine, as a man-slayer in a city of refuge, as Noah in the Ark. Not that this benefit is annexed to the mere outward form of baptism, but to that baptism which is accompanied with "the answer of a good conscience towards God^g."]

Being then *in Christ*, we are saved "by his resurrection"^h

[It should seem, that Noah's inclosure in the ark for so long a period was a kind of sepulture; and his elevation on the waters, till he afterwards came forth from the ark, was a kind of

^d Matt. xxiv. 37—39. 2 Pet. ii. 5. 9. Ps. xi. 6 and ix. 17.

^e 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

^f Acts iv. 12. Phil. iii. 9.

^g See the words following the text.

^h Ib.

of resurrection, when he took possession of a new world. Thus, according to St. Paul, "we are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life: for if we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrectionⁱ." This appears to be *intended* by St. Peter in the text, and to be, on the whole, the most natural, as well as most beautiful, construction of it: as Noah entered into the ark, and was saved by its elevation above the water-floods, so we, by baptism, enter into Christ, and are, by his resurrection, saved from sin and Satan, death and hell; yea, like Noah too, we are brought safely to the possession of a new and heavenly world^k.]

INFER

1. How deeply should we reverence the ordinances of God!

[What is said of baptism is true, in a measure, of every other ordinance: yet how shamefully is both that, and every other ordinance, profaned amongst us! Let us remember, that all the institutions of God are intended to help forward our salvation: but, if trifled with, they will fearfully aggravate our condemnation.]

2. How careful should we be to obtain "the answer of a good conscience!"

[In the apostles days, as well as in ours, they, who applied for baptism, were *interrogated* with respect to their faith and practice; nor could the mere ablution of the body profit them, if they had not a correspondent purity of soul. Thus it is with us: we shall in vain receive the rite of baptism, or partake of the Lord's supper, if we cannot *declare, as in the presence of God*, that it is our desire and endeavour to be holy as God is holy. Let us then not lay an undue stress upon outward observances of any kind; but rather seek a conformity to the divine image; for it will surely be found true at the last, that "the pure in heart shall see God," but that "*without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*"]

ⁱ Rom. vi. 4, 5. ^k If the opposition between *διδάσκοντες δι' ὕδατος* and *σωζέτε δι' ἀναστάσεως* be marked, the sense of this difficult passage will be more apparent.

CV. MELCHIZEDEC A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Heb. vii. 1—3. *For this Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham gave a tenthpart of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually.*

THE principal scope of the epistle to the Hebrews is, to shew the superiority of Christ above the ordinances, and dispensers, of the Levitical law. In prosecuting this argument the inspired writer frequently mentions a priesthood different from that of Aaron, a priesthood instituted by God before any one of Abraham's chosen descendants was born, and consequently intended for the benefit of the Gentile world; and he shews that Christ was, according to an express prediction, and a most solemn oath, to be a priest of this higher order, the order of Melchizedec^a.

The words of the text should properly be connected with ch. v. 10. the whole intervening part being, as it were, a parenthesis. The apostle, having laid great stress upon this prediction, now proceeds to illustrate it. He recites, in few words, the history to which the prediction itself refers, and declares, that it was altogether typical of Christ^b. The agreement between Melchizedec and Christ may be observed in two particulars

I. The dignity of their persons

Melchizedec, in reference to the import of his name, and the name of the city over which he presided, was called, king of righteousness, and king of peace: but in an infinitely higher degree do these titles belong to Christ^c

[Christ

^a Ps. cx. 4. with Heb. v. 6. 10. and vi. 20. and vii. 17. 21.

^b Gen. xiv. 14—20.

^c A very learned author has endeavoured to prove, that Melchizedec was not a man, but Christ himself. But, when the apostle so plainly speaks of him as a man, "*like unto the Son of God,*" and *lays so great a stress on the parallel* which he himself draws between them, it seems scarcely allowable to say, that the inspired writer spoke of him as a man (*contrary to his own better knowledge*) in conformity with the received opinion of the Jews. It appears safer to acquiesce in what the apostle has said (especially in such a place as this, where he builds so much of his argument upon his own statement) than to correct him, and teach him what he should have said.

[Christ is a king, not only over one city or country, but over the whole world; "his kingdom ruleth over all;" "he has the utmost ends of the earth for his possession;" he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." In his own person he is holy, harmless, separate from sinners; "he loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity;" he is indeed "the Holy One, and the Just." His laws are a perfect transcript of his mind and will, all holy, and just, and good. In his government he exercises the most perfect equity, not oppressing or despising any, but ever ready to afford protection, and succour, to all that call upon him. The very ends, for which he administers his government, are altogether worthy of his divine majesty; he rules his people, only that he may transform them all into his own image, and make them "partakers of his own holiness." In every view, he approves himself worthy of that august title which the voice of inspiration assigns him, "The Lord our Righteousness^d." But Jesus is also called, "The Prince of peace;" nor is this without reason, since he reconciles us to an offended God, and makes peace for us by the blood of his cross: yea, he brings peace into the wounded conscience; and calms the tempests, which were wont to agitate the soul — — —]

That typical king is also called a "priest of the most high God;" yet, though glorious in this respect, he was only a shadow of Jesus, our great High Priest

[Melchizedec, though a king, was not ashamed to execute the priestly office. Whether the bread and wine, which he provided for the refreshment of Abraham's troops, had any mystical signification, we pretend not to say^e; but certainly he acted as a priest, when he blessed Abraham; and was regarded as a priest by Abraham, who presented to him the tenth of all his spoils. As for Jesus, there was not any part of the priestly office which he did not perform. He was not indeed of that tribe to which the priesthood belonged, and therefore he was not instituted "according to the law of a carnal commandment;" but he was appointed of God with a solemn oath; and anointed to his office with a superabundant measure of the oil of gladness^e. Having, in order that he might have somewhat to offer, taken upon him our nature, he "presented himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour." And having shed his own blood, he is gone with it within the vail, and there carries on the work of intercession for us; and will soon come forth again, not like the Jewish High Priest, to bless one nation only, but, like Melchizedec, to bless the father of the faithful, together with all his children dispersed throughout the world.]

The

^d Jer. xxiii. 6.

^e Ps. xlv. 7.

The parallel between them may be yet further noticed in II. The duration of their priesthood

We are altogether indebted to the revelation of God for a just construction of what was related respecting Melchizedec, and of what was *intentionally* omitted in this history

[Melchizedec, like other men, was doubtless born of human parents, and cut off by death from this state of existence. But there is no mention made of his birth, or parentage, or death: nothing is said of any predecessor, whom he followed in his office, or of any successor to whom he resigned his office. These omissions, which might have been accounted for from the brevity of that part of the Mosaic history, we are assured were ordered of God, on purpose that, by appearing "not to have beginning of days or end of life," he might, as far as a mortal man could do, shadow forth the eternity of Christ's priesthood.]

What was figuratively ascribed to him, is literally true with respect to Christ

[Christ, though born after the world had stood 4000 years, was appointed to this office from all eternity; and actually executed it, by his representatives at least, from the first moment that Adam or Abel offered their sacrifices on the altar. Nor has he ceased from his priestly work: he is now within the vail, offering up the incense of his own prevailing intercession, while his people continue praying without. Nor will he desist from his labour as long as there shall continue one single soul, for whom to intercede before God. As he had none to precede him in his office, so will he have none to follow him; "He abideth a priest continually, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^f."]

ADVICE

1. Regard the Lord Jesus according to his real dignity

[Jesus unites in himself the kingly and priestly character. None of the Levitical kings or priests ever attained to this honour. Uzziah, presuming to exercise the priestly office, was smitten with a leprosy, and made a monument of the divine displeasure to the latest hour of his life^g. But Jesus, as was foretold concerning him, was, like Melchizedec, "a priest upon his throne^h." Let us view this combination of character with lively gratitude. Let us contemplate him as every way qualified to be a Saviour to us. And let us beg that he will exalt us also to "a royal priesthood, that we may offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through himⁱ."]

2. Look

^f Heb. vii. 23, 24, 25, 28, and xiii. 8.

^g 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21.

^h Zech. vi. 13.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 5. 9.

2. Look to him for the blessings which he is authorized to bestow

[As our exalted head "he is a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins." "He has received gifts even for the most rebellious:" and, having given himself for us, he is fully authorized to bestow upon us the purchase of his blood. Shall we not then make our application to him? Shall we not "open our mouths wide that he may fill them?" Surely, "if we be straitened, it is not in him, but in ourselves:" he would "satisfy the hungry with good things;" he would "fill us with all the fulness of God." O that that "God, who raised him up from the dead, would now send him to bless us, in turning every one of us from our iniquities^k!"]

3. Consecrate to him, not the tenth only of your spoils, but all that you possess

[Though we should "honour him with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase," yet that is by no means sufficient: we should dedicate to him all that we possess in mind, or body, or estate. We are not indeed called to dispose of all our goods in charity, but to ascribe to his bounty every thing we possess, and "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do it all to his glory." Have we overtaken and destroyed our spiritual enemies? Let us acknowledge that "his was the power, and the glory, and the victory." Let us see him in all things, and glorify him for all things; and "present to him both our bodies and our souls a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service^l."]

^k Acts iii. 26.

^l Rom. xii. 1.

CVI. ISAAC A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Gen. xxii. 6—10. *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son: and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife: and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering. So they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of: and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order; and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.*

MANY and wonderful are the instances of faith and obedience recorded in the scriptures. But no action

whatever (those only of our Lord himself excepted) has at any time surpassed or equalled that related in the text. It justly obtained for him who performed it, the honourable title of The Father of the Faithful, and, The Friend of God^a. We shall find it profitable to consider

I. The history itself

Abraham had often enjoyed intimate and immediate communion with the Deity. But now he heard the command which was of a most singular and afflictive nature

[God in some way clearly intimated to Abraham his will: nor left him to doubt one moment, whether it were his voice or not. He commanded Abraham to take his only, his beloved son, Isaac, and to offer him up as a burnt-offering in a place that should afterwards be pointed out. How strange the order! How difficult to be complied with! How well might Abraham have said, "Would God I might die for thee, O Isaac, my son, my son!"]

Instantly, however, and without reluctance, he arose to execute the will of God

[Had he presumed to reason with God, what specious arguments might he have adduced for declining the way of duty! The certainty of his being reproached by Sarah, "A bloody husband art thou to me^b:" the offence that would be taken by all the neighbouring nations against him, his religion, and his God: the counteracting and defeating of all the promises which had been made by God himself, and which were to be accomplished solely in and through his son Isaac^c: all this, with much more, might have been offered in excuse for his backwardness, if indeed he had been backward, to accomplish the will of God. But he conferred not with flesh and blood^d.]

Nor was he diverted from his purpose during the whole of his journey

[Having prepared the wood, he proceeded instantly, with Isaac and his servants, towards the place, that God had pointed out. Nor did he open his intentions to Sarah, lest she should labour to dissuade him from his purpose. But what must have been his thoughts every time that he looked on Isaac? Yet never for one moment did he relax his determination to execute the divine command. Having come in sight of the mountain, he ordered his servants to abide in their place, lest they should officiously interpose to prevent the intended offering.

^a Jam. ii. 21. 23.

^c Gen. xvii. 19.

^b Exod. iv. 25. 26.

^d Gal. i. 16.

offering. He put the wood on his son, and carried the fire and the knife in his own hands. Affecting as these preparations must have been to a father's heart, how must their poignancy have been heightened by that pertinent question, which was put to him by his son^e! His answer, like many other prophetic expressions, conveyed more than he himself probably was aware at the moment. Without giving a premature disclosure of his intention, he declares the advent of Jesus, that Lamb of God, who in due time should come to take away the sin of the world^f. Thus for three successive days did he maintain his resolution firm and unshaken.]

Having arrived at the spot determined by God, he with much firmness and composure proceeded to execute his purpose

[He built the altar, and laid the wood upon it in due order. Then with inexpressible tenderness announced to Isaac the command of God. Doubtless he would remind his son of his preternatural birth; and declare to him God's right to take away, in any manner he pleased, the gift he bestowed^g. He would exhort him to confide in God as a faithful and unchangeable God; and to rest assured, that he should, in some way or other, be restored, after he was reduced to ashes, and have every promise fulfilled to him. Having thus gained the consent of his son, he binds him hand and foot, and lays him on the altar; and, with a confidence unshaken, and obedience unparalleled, holds up the knife to slay the victim. Whether shall we more admire the resolution of the father, or the submission of the son? O that there were in all of us a similar determination to sacrifice our dearest interests for God; and a similar readiness to yield up our very lives in obedience to his will!]

Nothing but the interposition of God himself prevented the completion of this extraordinary sacrifice

[God had sufficiently tried the faith of his servant. He therefore, by a voice from heaven, stopped him from giving the fatal blow; ordered him to substitute a ram in the place of Isaac; renewed to him with an oath his former promises; rendered him a pattern to all succeeding generations; and, no doubt, is at this instant rewarding him with a weight of glory, proportioned to his exalted piety.]

Almost every circumstance in this narrative deserves to be considered in

II. Its typical reference

Waving

^e Ver. 7.

^f Ver. 8. John i. 29.

^g Job i. 21.

Waving many less important points, we may observe that Isaac was a type of Christ

1. In his appointment to be a sacrifice

[Isaac was a child of promise, born in a preternatural way, of a disposition eminently pious; yet him did God require for a burnt-offering: it must not be Abraham's cattle, or his son Ishmael, but his beloved Isaac. Thus was Jesus also, the promised seed, named, like Isaac, before he was conceived in the womb: He was born, not after the manner of other men, but of a pure virgin: He was that only, that beloved son, in whom the Father was well pleased: yet him did God appoint to be a sacrifice. A body was given him for this very purpose^h. He was ordained from eternity to be a propitiation for sinⁱ: nor did the Father recede from his purpose for 4,000 years. Having set apart his Son for this end, he changed not: and Jesus, at the appointed time, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross^k.]

2. In the manner of being offered

[Isaac bore the wood on which he was afterwards to be lifted up; and voluntarily yielded up his body to be bound, and his life to be destroyed in God's appointed way. Thus did Jesus bear his cross to the place of his crucifixion; and, having been bound, was lifted up upon it. On the very spot where Isaac had been laid upon the altar, was Jesus (most probably) offered in sacrifice to God^l. And by whose hand was Isaac to bleed, but by that of his own Father? By whom too did Jesus suffer, but by Jehovah's sword^m? It was not *man*, who made him so to agonize in the garden; nor was it *man*, that caused that bitter complaint upon the crossⁿ. Nevertheless it was with the perfect concurrence of his own will that he died upon the cross; "*He gave himself* an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour^o."]

There is one point however wherein the resemblance does not appear

[For

^h Heb. x. 4, 5.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 25.

^k Phil. ii. 8.

^l Mount Calvary was one of the mountains in that small tract of country called the land of Moriah; and from ver. 2. it can scarcely be doubted, but that it was the very spot pointed out by God. It could not possibly be far from the spot; and therefore, when the place for the sacrifice of Isaac was so accurately marked, it can scarcely be thought to be any other, than the very place where Jesus was offered 2,000 years afterwards.

^m Zech. xiii. 7. Isai. liii. 10. ⁿ Luke xxii. 44. Mark xv. 34.

^o Eph. v. 2.

[For Isaac was found a substitute; for Jesus none. Neither the cattle on a thousand hills, nor all the angels in heaven, could have stood in his place. None but Jesus could have made a full atonement for our sins. He therefore saved not himself, because He was determined to save us.]

INFER

1. How marvellous is the love of God to man!

[We admire the obedience of Abraham: but God had a right to demand it: and Abraham knew, that he was about to give his son to his best and dearest friend. But what claim had we on God? Yet did he give up his Son for us, for us sinners, rebels, enemies; nor merely to a common death, but to the agonies of crucifixion, and to endure the wrath due to our iniquities^p. What stupendous love! Shall any soul be affected with a pathetic story, and remain insensible of the love of God? Let every heart praise him, trust him, serve him: and rest assured, that He, who delivered up his Son for us, will never deny us any other thing that we can ask^q.]

2. What an admirable grace is faith

[The faith of Abraham certainly had respect to Christ, the promised seed^r. And, behold how it operated! So will it operate in all who have it. It will keep us from staggering at any promise, however dark or improbable; and will lead us to obey every precept, however difficult or self-denying. Let us seek his faith: and, while we are justified by it from the guilt of sin, let us manifest its excellence by a life of holiness.]

^p Isai. liii. 6.

^q Rom. viii. 32.

^r Heb. xi. 17-19.

CVII. SARAH AND HAGAR WITH THEIR CHILDREN TYPES OF THE TWO COVENANTS.

Gal. iv. 22—24. *It is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free-woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory.*

THERE are many things in the Old Testament which we should have passed over as unworthy of any particular notice, if their use and importance had not been pointed out to us in the New Testament. Such is the occurrence

which is here referred to; and which the apostle found to be of singular use to illustrate the nature of the Gospel covenant. He was endeavouring to counteract the influence of those Judaizing teachers, who had perverted the faith of the Galatians: with this view he expostulates with those who had turned aside to a compliance with the ceremonial law; and shews them, by an allegorical explanation of the history before us, that the law itself might have taught them a very different conduct.

To understand the allegory in all its parts, we must attend carefully to the main scope of it, which is, to shew, that, as both Sarah and Hagar brought forth children to Abraham, yet those children differed widely from each other, so the old and new covenants bring forth, as it were, children to God, but there will be found, between their respective offspring, such a difference as may well deter men from returning to the covenant of works, and make them resolutely adhere to the covenant of grace.

We may observe then a corresponding difference between the two women and their offspring, and the two covenants and their offspring

I. In their nature

[Ishmael, the son of the bond-woman, was born according to the common course of nature: but Isaac, the son of the free-woman, was born in a preternatural way, through the more immediate agency of God himself.

Thus they, who are under the law, have nothing but what they derive in a natural way from their parents. They may possess strong intellects, and discover many amiable qualities; but whatsoever they have, it is all carnal; no part of it is spiritual; their reason is carnal reason; their affections are carnal affections. But they, who are under the covenant of grace, are "born of God;" their faculties are all renewed; their views and desires are spiritual; they have "put off the old man, and put on the new;" yea, they are partakers, as far as flesh and blood can be, of a divine nature^a. Hence they are called "new creatures;" and are as much distinguished from the mere natural man, as light is from darkness, or Christ from Belial^b.

This is the first point of distinction which the apostle himself notices; and it is confirmed by the declaration of our Lord, that

^a 2 Pet. i. 4.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

that whatsoever is born of the flesh is carnal; whereas, that which is born of the spirit (as all, who embrace the new covenant, are) is spiritual^c.]

II. In their disposition

[Ishmael, being born of the bond-woman, was himself a slave; and therefore must, of necessity, have a servile spirit; but Isaac, the child of promise, felt all that freedom of spirit, which an affectionate and beloved child is privileged to enjoy.

Thus the children of the old covenant are "brought forth to bondage." They may obey in many respects the will of their Father, but they are invariably actuated, either by self-righteous hopes, or slavish fears. Whatever they do for God, it is "grudgingly and of necessity:" his work is irksome to them; or, if at any time it be pleasant, their satisfaction arises from pride and self-complacency, and not from any delight they feel in his service. But the children of the new covenant are enabled to walk before God with holy confidence and joy. They serve him, not from fear, but from love; not that he *may* save them, but because he *has* saved them. Whatever they want, they make known their requests to him, assured that he will gladly do for them more than they can ask or think. Thus they maintain sweet fellowship with him, regarding him in all things, not as a Master or a Judge, but as a Father and a Friend.

This distinction too is marked by the apostle, who says also in another place, that believers have not received the spirit of bondage *again* to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father^d.]

III. In their conduct

[Whatever outward conformity Ishmael might shew to his father's will, it is certain he was averse to it in his heart; for he persecuted Isaac on account of his superior piety, and for claiming an exclusive right to his father's inheritance: but Isaac patiently endured the trial, "knowing in whom he had believed," and that "He was faithful who had promised."

Thus it is with all the children of the old covenant: they may obey the law in many points; but they do not really love it in any respect: on the contrary, they hate those, whose superior piety is a reproach to them, and who profess, that the children of promise shall exclusively inherit their father's kingdom. Our Lord teaches all his followers to expect this treatment, and to expect it on this very account from those, who are merely born after the flesh: "if," says he, "ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not

^c Ver. 23. with John iii. 6. ^d Ver. 24, 25. with Rom. viii. 15.

not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you^c." The children of the new covenant, in the mean time, meekly bear the cross; "being defamed, they entreat; being persecuted, they suffer it;" "committing themselves to him that judgeth righteously," and waiting the accomplishment of all his promises.]

IV. In their end

[Ishmael, by his conduct, brought upon himself that very exclusion, which he had confidently supposed would never take place: and Isaac in due time inherited the portion, which, in dependence on God's word, he had professed to expect. Nor was the difference made merely through the partiality of the parents, but by the express order of God himself^f.

Thus shall they, who are under the law, be, ere long, banished from their father's house. In vain shall they plead their *carnal* relation to God, and his people: they belong to a covenant that entails on them a curse, and not a blessing^g: and though they will not be persuaded of their danger now, yet will they find at last, that their confidence was presumption, and their hope, vanity^b. On the contrary, they who are under the covenant of grace will inherit the promised land: their professions shall be vindicated, their expectations realized, their hopes accomplished: and to eternity shall they dwell with God, as monuments of his sovereign grace, and his unchanging faithfulness.]

We shall still continue to follow the apostle in the IMPROVEMENT of this subject. It is useful

1. For examination

[There cannot be a more interesting inquiry than this, Am I a "child of the bond-woman, or of the freeⁱ?" Nor will it be difficult to attain a satisfactory knowledge of our state, if we will but follow the clue, which this instructive allegory affords us. Let us ask ourselves then, What have I that nature cannot give, and that evidently marks me as born of God? Am I walking with God in the daily exercise of filial affection, accounting his service to be perfect freedom; or am I rendering him only a formal, partial, and constrained obedience? Do I look for heaven as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ; and expect it solely on the humiliating terms of the new covenant: or am I ready to take offence at the electing love of God, and to deride as deluded enthusiasts those, who found all their hopes upon it? According to the answer which conscience gives to these queries, we may determine to which covenant we belong, and consequently,

^c Ver. 29, with John xv. 19. ^f Gen. xxi. 10, 12. ^g Gal. iii. 10.

^b Ver. 30, with John viii. 35. and Matt. viii. 11, 12. ⁱ Ver. 31.

quently, what our end must be when we go hence. Let our inquiries then be prosecuted with care and diligence, that, when our state is ascertained, we may tremble or rejoice, as the occasion may demand.]

2. For direction

[When we are brought under the covenant of grace, we are ever in danger of returning to the covenant of works. We are prone to indulge self-righteous hopes, and servile fears. We are ready to confound the covenants by associating works with our faith as joint-grounds of our hope. But we must carefully avoid this, and watch against every approach towards it. We must "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free; and never more be entangled with the yoke of bondage^k." "Salvation is by grace through faith:" and "it is by faith, that it may be by grace." The very instant we mix any work of ours with Christ's obedience unto death, we fall from grace, and Christ becomes of no effect to us^l. Faith and works, *as grounds of our justification before God*, are opposites, and can no more be blended than light and darkness^m. Let us then hold fast the covenant of grace; and, in spite of all the persecution which our profession may bring upon us, let us "maintain our confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope, firm unto the end."]

^k Ch. v. 1.

^l Ib. ver. 2, 4.

^m Rom. iv. 14. and xi. 6.

CVIII. JOSEPH A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Gen. xlix. 22—24. *Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob: from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel.*

PECULIAR care is to be used in unfolding the types, lest, by indulging our own imagination, we bring the very truth of God itself into contempt. Where the Scriptures themselves have marked the typical reference, we may proceed without fear; but when once they cease to guide us, we should not venture one step but with fear and trembling. This observation is peculiarly applicable to the subject before us. It does not appear that

Joseph is any where declared to be a type of Christ, notwithstanding the circumstances wherein they resemble each other, are as numerous and remarkable, as in almost any other instance whatever. We forbear therefore to assert any thing on this subject with confidence ; while, in compliance with the opinion of the most judicious commentators, and indeed with the almost irresistible conviction of our own mind, we proceed to trace the resemblance of Joseph to Christ, in

I. His distinguishing character

Joseph is represented as “ a fruitful bough ”

[Every tribe is distinguished by something characteristic, either of the patriarchs themselves, or of their descendants. The distinction assigned to Joseph, is that of peculiar fruitfulness : and to him it eminently belonged. All his brethren indeed were honoured with being heads of distinct tribes : but Joseph had both his sons chosen of God, and appointed to be heads of separate tribes ; and thus two tribes sprang from him, while one tribe only sprang from any of his brethren.]

To our Lord also is a similar title frequently ascribed

[Jesus was that “ beautiful and glorious BRANCH,” which was in due time to spring from the stem of Jesse^a, the fruit whereof was to fill the whole earth^b. It was not one tribe only, or two, that was to acknowledge him as their head, but all the tribes ; yea, Gentiles as well as Jews, even all the ends of the earth : his fruit was to shake like the woods of Lebanon, and they, who should spring from him, were to be numerous as the piles of grass^c, the stars of heaven^d, and the sand upon the sea shore^e. And so abundantly has this prediction been already verified, that we may say of this branch as the Psalmist did of *that* which typically represented it, “ It has taken deep root, and filled the land : the hills are covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof are like the goodly cedars ; it has sent forth its boughs unto the sea, and its branches unto the river^f.”]

But the resemblance will more fully appear, while we consider

II. His grievous sufferings

Joseph was for many years very grievously afflicted

[He was eminently the beloved of his Father^g ; and, being

^a Isai. iv. 2. and xi. 1.

^b Isai. xxvii. 6.

^c Ps. lxxii. 16.

^d Gen. xv. 5. ^e Gen. xxii. 17. ^f Ps. lxxx. 9—11, ^g Gen. xxxvii. 3.

being utterly averse to sin himself, he would reprove, and lay before his father, the misconduct of his brethren^b: he also, unreservedly, communicated to them all the repeated intimations, which he had had in dreams, respecting his future exaltation above his whole familyⁱ. For these reasons he was envied, hated, and persecuted by his brethren^k. And when he came to them from his father, upon an errand of love, they conspired against him to kill him^l. An opportunity offering at the moment, they sold him into the hands of strangers for twenty pieces of silver^m. After that, he was accused of a crime he utterly abhorred, and, without any one to plead his cause, was cast into prisonⁿ, where, for a time at least, "he was laid in irons," and galled with heavy fetters^o; so "sorely did the archers grieve him, and shoot at him, and hate him."^j

And can we err in tracing here the sufferings of our Lord?

[Jesus was, infinitely above all others, the well-beloved of his Father^p; and, while he faithfully reproved the sins of his brethren, declared to them his future exaltation and glory^q. Filled with envy and wrath against him, they said, as it were in malignant triumph, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him^r;" so cruelly "did they reward him evil for good, and hatred for his love^s." When he was come to them from his Father with the most benevolent design, behold, one of his own disciples sold him, and *that* to strangers too, for thirty pieces of silver^t. He was accused of blasphemy against God, and of rebellion against his king; and, without any one appearing to speak on his behalf^u, was instantly condemned; and thus, though "none could convince him of sin," "was numbered with the transgressors." Could there have been such a coincidence of circumstances between his lot and Joseph's, at least is it probable there would have been, if it had not been particularly ordained of God?]

We may pursue the comparison yet further, in

III. His unshaken constancy

Joseph was marvellously upheld under all his trials

[Though he besought his brethren with cries and tears, we read not of any reproachful language that he used: when he entreated Pharaoh's butler to intercede for him, he did not so much as mention either his brethren, who had sold him, or his

^b Gen. xxxvii. 2.

ⁱ Ib. 5, 9.

^k Ib. 4, 11.

^l Ib. 18—20.

^m Ib. 28.

ⁿ Ib. xxxix. 12—20.

^o Ps. cv. 18. ^p Matt. iii. 17. ^q John vii. 7. & Matt. xxvi. 64.

^r Matt. xxi 38.

^s Ps. cix. 3—5.

^t Matt. xxvi. 15. 16. ^u Isai. liii. 8. See Bp. Lowth's translation and note, and Ps. lxix. 20.

his mistress, who had falsely accused him^{*}: nor, while he was enduring his hard lot, did he once murmur or repine at the providence of God: through the whole of his trial he possessed his soul in patience: nor, when he had it in his power to revenge himself, did he render any thing but love for hatred, and good for evil. The *apparent* unkindness of his deportment, which he adopted for a time, was a violence done to his own feelings, in order that he might discern the real state of their minds, and reveal himself to them afterwards to better effect[†]. When the proper season was arrived, he fully evinced the tenderness of his heart, and the delight he took in the exercise of mercy; and, so far from upbraiding his brethren, he said all he could to extenuate their crime, and referred the whole event to the overruling providence of God[‡]. So effectually were “his hands strengthened by the mighty God of Jacob,” that in no instance was he “overcome of evil, but at all times overcame evil with good.”]

Our blessed Lord also shone like him, only with infinitely brighter lustre

[Never did an inadvertent word drop from the lips of Jesus under all his persecutions: “When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously^a.” As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth^b either in menaces, or complaints. His meekness was uniform, his fortitude undaunted, his patience invincible. He sought nothing but the good of those who were daily conspiring against his life: he wept over them, when they resisted all his overtures of mercy^c; he even prayed for them, and apologized for their crimes, when they were in the very act of putting him to death^d: and, after his resurrection, commanded that the offers of salvation through his blood should be made *first* to the very people, who had so lately shed it^e.]

There is yet one more feature of resemblance to be noticed, in

IV. His glorious advancement

After all his trials Joseph was exalted to a throne

[Through the good providence of God, Joseph was enabled to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh, and was, on that account, brought from the dungeon, and made, next to Pharaoh, the supreme governor of the Egyptian kingdom^f: all were ordered to bow the knee to Joseph^g; and all, who came for a supply of corn, received this direction, Go to Joseph^h. Thus did God

^a Gen. xl. 14, 15.

^y Gen. xlii. 7, 9, 12.

^z Gen. xlv. 5.

[†] 1 Pet. ii. 23.

^b Isai. liii. 7.

^c Luke xix. 41.

^d Luke xxiii. 34.

^e Luke xxiv. 47.

^f Gen. xli. 14, 15, 41.

^g Gen. xli. 43.

^h Ib. 55.

God exalt him to be both "the shepherd and the stone of Israel," that he might not only provide for Egypt and the neighbouring kingdoms, but be an effectual support to all his kindred, and preserve the lives of those very persons, who had sought his destruction.]

Can we reasonably doubt but that in this he was a type of Jesus?

[Jesus was raised from the prison of the grave by the effectual working of God's power: "he was highly exalted; and had a name given him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bowⁱ:" "all power was committed to him in heaven and in earth; and all things were put under him, HE only excepted, who did put all things under him^k." Whatever we want for our souls, we must receive it all out of his fulness^l: the direction given to every living creature is, Go to Jesus, Look to Jesus^m. And how does he exercise his power? Behold he calls his sinful brethren from a land of want and misery, and brings them to his own land of peace and plenty. There he nourishes them with the bread of life, and "reigns over the house of Jacob for ever and ever." Thus, as "the great Shepherd of the sheep," he both feeds and rules his flock, while as "the foundation" and "corner-stone" he supports and connects, confirms and dignifies, all the "*Israel*" of Godⁿ.]

By way of IMPROVEMENT we observe

1. The purposes of God, whatever may be done to frustrate them, shall surely be accomplished

[We are amazed at the variety of incidents, that *seemed* to put the elevation of Joseph, and of Christ, *almost* beyond the reach of Omnipotence itself. Yet God's purposes were accomplished by the very means used to defeat them. Thus shall it be with us also, if we confide in the word of God. Whatever means Satan, or the world, may use to "separate us from God," they shall not prevail. "What God has promised, he is able also to perform." Let us therefore trust in him; for He will work, and who shall let it? He hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? His counsel shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure^o.]

2. God's dearest children must expect many trials in their way to glory

[Joseph, and Christ, endured much before their exaltation. And we also "through much tribulation shall enter into the

ⁱ Phil. ii. 9—11. Ps. lxxii. 8, 9, 11. ^k 1 Cor. xv. 27. ^l John i. 16.

^m Isai. xlv. 22. John vii. 37.

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. ii. 6.

^o Isai. xliii. 13. and xiv. 27. and xlv. 10.

the kingdom." The number and weight of our trials are no grounds of concluding ourselves to be objects of God's displeasure: they should rather, especially if they be sanctified to us, be considered as tokens of his love^p. As the captain of our salvation was, so also must we be, made perfect through sufferings^q. Let us then "arm ourselves with the mind that was in Christ." We shall surely have no reason to regret the difficulties of the way, when we have attained the rest prepared for us.]

3. We should not labour to control events, but study rather to accommodate ourselves to the circumstances in which God has placed us

[How often might Joseph have escaped from the house of Potiphar, or sent to his brethren the news of his exaltation in Egypt! But he left all in the hands of God, endeavouring only to fulfil his duty, whether as a slave or a steward, whether as a jailer or a prince. Thus did our Lord also, when he could in ten thousand ways have changed the course of events. Let us do likewise. Whatever be our circumstances or condition in life, let us be more desirous of glorifying God under them, than of contriving, by any means, to alter them. God's time and manner of accomplishing his own ends will be found infinitely better in the issue, than any we can devise^r. Let us then tarry his leisure, and leave ourselves wholly to his disposal, and approve ourselves to him as faithful, and obedient children.]

^p Heb. xii. 6.

^q Heb. ii. 10.

^r Isai. lv. 8, 9.

CIX. MOSES AND CHRIST COMPARED IN THEIR PROPHETICAL OFFICE.

Acts iii. 22, 23. *Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.*

THERE are innumerable beauties in the holy scriptures, which escape the notice of the superficial observer, but which, when discovered, abundantly compensate all the labour that can attend the minutest investigation. Critics have bestowed much pains in searching out the beauties of heathen authors, and have often given them credit for excellencies,

excellencies, that were neither designed, nor discovered, by the authors themselves. But we need never be afraid of ascribing too much to him, who delivered to us the sacred oracles. If time would permit, we might point out a great variety of passages that would illustrate this remark. But *that* before us, may stand as a specimen of the rest. Peter had exhorted the Jews to believe in Christ, that their sins might be blotted out by his blood. The Jews imagined, that a compliance with this exhortation would be a defection from Moses. Peter therefore obviated this objection by an appeal to the writings of Moses; and shewed them, that Moses himself, not only foretold the advent of this new prophet, but enjoined an unreserved obedience to him under the severest penalties. Thus he turned their regard for Moses into an argument in support of that very doctrine, which for the sake of Moses they were inclined to reject. His words naturally lead us to set before you

I. The character of Christ

The words of the text are twice mentioned in Deut. xviii. and twice mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles^a. They may well therefore be considered as deserving peculiar attention.

They set forth the character of Christ *literally*

[When God had spoken to the Jews in thunderings and lightnings, they entreated that he would, in future, communicate his mind and will to them through a mediator. He, approving their request, promised them a prophet raised up from among themselves, who should fully reveal to them his most secret counsels^b. Such a prophet was Jesus. He was raised up in a most extraordinary way, being the son of a pure virgin. He was taken from among their brethren, being of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David. "Though he was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, he took upon him the form of a servant;" yea, "became a worm and no man, the very scorn of men and the outcast of the people." He revealed all that it was needful for men to know, and "opened their understandings, that they might understand it." To him did the Father himself, by an audible voice from heaven, apply this prophecy^c. And Jesus thus *literally* executed the commission given him of the Father.]

But

^a Acts vii. 37.

^b Deut. xviii. 16—18.

^c Matt. xvii. 5.

But it is in a *typical* view that the text is principally to be considered

[Our Lord resembled Moses in the offices of a lawgiver, a saviour, an intercessor. But, waving all observations respecting these, let us trace the resemblance which subsisted between them, as “prophets” of the most high God.

Both of them *received their doctrines in the same way*. Moses was not merely instructed, like other prophets, by visions, or dreams, or by the “still small voice” of inspiration, but was admitted to converse with God as a man talketh with his friend, and received the law from the hands of God, engraven upon stones by God himself. In this he differed from all the other prophets that ever existed in the world, till this new prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, arose. But Christ had been from all eternity “in the bosom of the Father^d ;” and he taught the very truths which he had heard, and learned, of the Father^e.

Both of them also *taught the very same doctrine*. Moses gave the law to be a “ministration of death,” and a rule of life; and our Lord explained, and enforced it, for the very same ends. Moses also pointed the people to the sacrifices as the only means of expiating their offences: our Lord also declared, that he “gave his life a ransom for many;” and that it was by the shedding of his blood alone, that any could obtain the remission of their sins^f.

Moreover both of them *taught in the same manner*. Moses spake, not as one giving advice, but *with authority*, “Thus saith the Lord;” yet he instructed the people *with astonishing meekness* and forbearance: and when they, in direct opposition to what he had taught them, revolted from God, and set up a golden calf, he was so filled *with compassion* towards them, as to pray, that he himself might be blotted out of the book of God, rather than that they should suffer the punishment due to their transgressions. Thus did Jesus preface his instructions with that *authoritative* declaration, “I say unto you:” yet so mild was he, that he made his meekness a plea with persons, to encourage them to learn of him; “Learn of me, for I am *meek* and lowly of heart:” and to such a degree did he *compassionate* the obstinate refusers of his law, that he wept over them, and with his dying breath pleaded their ignorance in extenuation of their guilt^g.]

While Moses thus explicitly foretold the prophetic character of our Lord, he declared to us also

II. Our duty resulting from it

As all the offices of Christ are replete with benefits to our souls, so each lays upon us some correspondent duties and

^d John i. 18.

^e John viii. 28.

^f Matt. xxvi. 28.

^g Luke xix. 41. & xxiii. 34.

and obligations. While we rely on him as our Priest, and obey him as our King, we must regard him as our Prophet, by attending to his instructions

This is plainly *declared* in the text

[“*Him* shall ye hear,” is the command of God. But it is not in a careless manner, that we are to regard his voice; we must incline our ear to him, and hear him *with fixed attention*. We must so consider the dignity of his person, and the importance of his message, as to receive his word *with the deepest reverence*; not gainsaying it, and sitting in judgment upon it, but bringing every high thought and every proud reasoning, into subjection to it^h. It becomes us also to listen to it *with lively joy*, as to the voice of our Beloved; knowing that there is not a word of his lips, in which there are not treasures of knowledge, and inexhaustible fountains of salvationⁱ. Above all, we must attend to it *with unreserved submission* to his will: we must obey it “in *all things, whatsoever* he shall say unto us:” whatever he may enjoin or forbid, we must never reply, “This is an hard saying;” but must instantly “pluck out the right eye, or cut off the right hand, that has caused us to offend.”]

Nor is this merely declared; it is *enforced* also by the most awful sanctions

[God will put a difference between his friends and his enemies, in the last day. They shall all indeed appear before his tribunal; but “he will separate the goats from the sheep.” They, that hear not this great prophet, shall be taken from among those who have obeyed his voice; “they shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” As Korah and his company were destroyed from among Israel, so shall the disobedient from among the just. It will be of little avail for them to say, I was sober, charitable, devout: if they did not hear that prophet with attention, reverence, joy, and an unreserved submission to his will, their destruction is sure, their doom is sealed. Nor will there be any exception to it in favour of the great and learned; every soul is alike included. Let none reply, God forbid; for God says, “*It shall come to pass*,” and “he is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent.” What madness then is it for any person whatsoever to persist in a neglect of the words of Christ! O, let us turn to him. Let us sit, with Mary, at his feet^k. Let us hear *him*, and him *only*. Let us believe on him as “the way, the truth, and the life.” Let us “deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow him.” “So shall we be his true disciples,” and, in due season, experience the accomplishment of that promise, “Where I am, there shall also my servant be^l.”] In

^h 2 Cor. x. 5.

ⁱ Isai. xii. 3.

^k Luke x. 39.

^l John xii. 26.

In this threatening, however, there is a blessed promise implied

[If the disobedient be destroyed *from among* the Lord's people, it follows, that the obedient shall not be destroyed; the humble, and sincere follower of Jesus shall never perish. This also extends to all; "*every soul*" that shall unfeignedly obey his voice, whatever his past life may have been, shall most assuredly be saved. Unbelief may be ready to make exceptions; but God says, "*It shall come to pass.*" Nor is this merely an uncertain inference from the text, but an express promise from God himself; "**HEAR, AND YOUR SOUL SHALL LIVE^m.**" Let this encourage us to listen more than ever to the voice of Jesus in his word. Let us read, and meditate, and pray. Let us get our souls cast, as it were, into the mould of the gospel, that, being altogether formed and fashioned by it, we may be "meet for the inheritance" reserved for us. Thus will this prophet be glorified in us; and we receive the full benefit of his instructions.]

^m Isai. lv. 3.

CX. CHRIST'S PRE-EMINENCE ABOVE AARON AND THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS.

Heb. ix. 11, 12. *Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

THOUGH there are a multitude of types, besides those which were instituted by Moses, yet the direct and complete representations of Christ are certainly to be found in the Mosaic ritual. Amidst the various ordinances relative to the priests and the temple, there is perhaps not any one point, however minute, which has not a typical reference, though, for want of an infallible instructor, we cannot precisely ascertain the meaning in every particular. The Epistle to the Hebrews, however, affords us great assistance in our inquiries into this subject, inasmuch as it declares the exact relation between the types and the one great Antitype in all the principal and most important points. The text especially, connected as it is with the whole preceding and following context, leads us to consider

I. The resemblance between Christ and the Aaronic priests

It would be endless to enumerate all the points of agreement between them: we shall rather confine our attention to those referred to in the text.

1. The high priests were taken from among men to mediate between God and them

[This is expressly declared to be the end of their institution^a. Aaron and his descendants were called to this office^b, and, in all the transactions between the Israelites and their God, performed that office according to the commandment. Thus our blessed Lord was taken from among men; he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He assumed our nature for that very purpose, that he might be capable of officiating as our great high priest^c, and, in that nature, he both comes from God to us, and goes to God from us.]

2. Their mediation was to be carried on by means of sacrifices

[The precise method in which they were to execute their office is recorded in the 16th of Leviticus: nor could they deviate from it in the least: if any but the high priest had presumed to enter within the vail, or he, on any other day than that of the annual atonement, or even then without the blood of the sacrifices^d, he would have instantly been smitten, as a monument of divine vengeance. Thus Christ approached not his God without a sacrifice^e. He presented his own sacred body as an offering for sin; and, having "offered himself without spot to God," he is "gone with his own blood within the vail," and makes that blood the ground of his intercession on our behalf^f.]

3. They obtained blessings for those on whose behalf they mediated

[The judgments, which God had denounced against the transgressors of his law, were averted, when the high priest had presented the accustomed offerings, and God was reconciled to his offending people. In like manner does Christ make reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross^g: He "gives his own life a ransom for us," and thus redeems us from those awful judgments, which our sins have merited. Nor is it a mere deliverance from punishment that we obtain through him: "we are brought nigh to God by his blood," and are restored to the possession of our forfeited inheritance^h.]

But while the text intimates the resemblance between Christ and the high priests, it most unequivocally declares also

II. His

^a Heb. v. 1.

^d Ver. 7.

^g Col. i. 20.

^b Ib. 4.

^e Heb. viii. 3.

^h Eph. i. 7. 11.

^c Heb. ii. 14—17.

^f Ver. 24, with the text.

II. His pre-eminence above them

This part of the subject also would open a large field for discussion: but, confining ourselves to the text, we shall notice his pre-eminence only in the particulars which are there specified.

1. He officiated in a far nobler tabernacle

[As he belonged not to the tribe to which the priesthood attached, he could not exercise his ministry within the precincts allotted to themⁱ. The tabernacle therefore, in which he officiated, was his own body, while he continued upon earth; and, the heaven of heavens, when he ascended within the vail^k. How infinitely does this exalt him above all the Aaronic priests! We allow that the tabernacle was glorious: but what glory had it, when compared with Christ's immaculate body, in which, not a mere symbol only of the divine presence dwelt, but all the fulness of the Godhead? And what was the holy of holies in comparison of heaven itself, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God? Surely in whichever light we view the tabernacle, in which Christ officiated, we must acknowledge it to have been far "greater and more perfect than that which was made with hands."]]

2. He offered a far more valuable sacrifice

[The high priests could offer nothing but the blood of beasts, which had not in itself the smallest efficacy towards the expiation of sin: the virtue, which it had, was wholly derived from its typical relation to the great sacrifice. But "Christ is entered into the holy place with his own blood;" and there presents it before God as a propitiation for our sins. Compare the sacrifices then, the blood of goats and of calves, with the blood of our incarnate God: who does not see the worthlessness of the one, and the infinite value of the other? No wonder that the former needed to be "offered year by year continually," since it had no power to take away sin, or to pacify an accusing conscience^l: but the latter fully satisfies for the sins of the whole world, and, having been once offered, perfects for ever them that are sanctified by it^m.]

3. He obtained far richer benefits for his people

[The utmost that the high priest obtained for the people was, a remission of those civil or political penalties which were annexed to their several transgressions: with respect to real pardon before God, the annual repetition of their sacrifices sufficiently manifested, that *that* was beyond the sphere of their

ⁱ Heb. vii. 13.

^k Heb. viii. 2. The "tabernacle" seems primarily to refer to his body. Compare John i. 14. ἑσκήνωσεν, with Col. ii. 9. But it may also relate to heaven, since it certainly was a figure of that also, ver. 24.

^l Heb. ix. 9.

^m 1 John ii. 2. Heb. x. 14.

their influence". But Christ has obtained for us redemption from all the bitter consequences of sin; as well from the sufferings, which we should have endured in the future world, as from the bondage, to which we should have remained subject in this present life. Nor are the effects of his sacrifice transient, like those under the law: it excels no less in the duration than in the greatness of the benefits it procures; it obtains for us, not redemption only, but "*eternal redemption*." Well then may he be called "*an High Priest of good things*;" for there is nothing good in time or eternity, which he does not procure for those who seek an interest in his mediation.]

This subject may serve to SHEW us

1. What use to make of the Levitical law

[If we read it merely as a system of rites and ceremonies, without considering the end of its institution, it will appear absurd, and utterly unworthy of its divine author: but, if we view it in its relation to Christ, it will appear beautiful and very instructive. There is no longer a veil over it with respect to us^a; let us look at it therefore as at a mirror, that reflects his glory; and we shall have no cause to regret the time and labour that we employ in exploring its mysterious contents.]

2. How to appreciate the blessings of redemption

[We may form some judgment of them by meditating on the terrors of hell, and the glories of heaven: but there is nothing that can so fully discover their value, as a consideration of the price paid for them. Who can reflect on "*the precious blood of Christ by which we are redeemed*," and entertain low thoughts of the blessings purchased by it? Would men be so indifferent about salvation, if they *thus* considered how great it was? Surely, it would be impossible: callous as the human heart is, it would melt into contrition at the sight of an expiring God^b. Let us but habituate ourselves to such views as these, and neither earth nor hell shall ever hold us in the bonds of sin. With such a sight of the prize, we shall never cease to run till we have obtained it.]

3. What grounds of hope there are for the very chief of sinners

[Had any other price been paid for our redemption, many might have doubted, whether it were sufficient for *them*: but who can doubt, when he knows, that he has been bought with the blood of Christ? This will expiate the foulest guilt: the difference, that exists between one sinner and another, is lost, when they apply to Christ's infinitely meritorious atonement: its efficacy is the same, whatever degrees of guilt we may have contracted: it will avail for one, as well as for another; nor is there any "*sin of such a scarlet or crimson die, but it shall be made*

^a Heb. x. 1, 4, 11.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 14.

^c Zech. xii. 10.

made white as snow," the very instant it is washed in this fountain: "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin." Let none then despair: let us rather consider what "an High Priest we have over the house of God;" and "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need^a."]

^a Heb. iv. 14, 16. and x. 19—22.

CXI. JOSHUA A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Dent. iii. 28. *Charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.*

IN reading the records of God's dealings with the Jews, we are sometimes tempted to bring him to the bar of human reason, and to arraign his character as severe. Such hasty judgment, however, would be impious in the extreme; since we are wholly incompetent to decide upon matters, which are so far beyond our reach. There may be, and doubtless are, ten thousand reasons to justify his conduct, where our slender capacities cannot find any: and such light has been cast upon his procedure, in many instances, by the gospel, as may fully evince the necessity of shutting our mouths, and of giving him credit for perfect equity, even where his dispensations most oppose our natural feelings. We may instance this in the exclusion of Moses from the promised land. He had brought the people out of Egypt, and, with most unparalleled meekness, had endured their perverseness forty years in the wilderness: yet, when he had led them to the very borders of Canaan, he was not suffered to go in with them; but, on account of one single offence, was obliged to devolve on Joshua his office, his authority, his honours; yea, he was forbidden even to pray for an admission into that good land^a. Dark as this dispensation must have appeared at the time, we are enabled to discern a propriety and excellency in it. It was altogether of a typical nature: for while *he* represented the law, Joshua, his successor, was a very eminent type of Christ. The text naturally

naturally leads us to shew this: and we shall trace the resemblance of Joshua to Christ

I. In his name

The name of *Joshua* was intended to designate his work and office

[His name originally was Osea, but was altered by Moses to Joshua^b. This, doubtless, was of God's appointment, that he might be thereby rendered a more remarkable type of Jesus. This name imported, that he should be a *divine Saviour*^c; and though, in the strictest and fullest sense, it could not properly belong to him; yet, as he was to be such a distinguished representative of Jesus, it was very properly given to him.]

The name of *Jesus* still more fitly characterized the work that was to be performed by *him*

[This name is precisely the same with Joshua in the Greek language; and repeatedly do we, in the New Testament, translate it, "Jesus," when it ought rather to have been translated, "Joshua^d." It was given to our Lord by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb^e: and the express reason of it was assigned, namely, that "he should *save* his people from their sins." To him it is applicable in the fullest extent, because he is "God manifest in the flesh," "Emmanuel, God with us;" and because he is the author, not of a typical and temporary, but of a real and eternal salvation, to all his followers^f.]

This striking coincidence, with respect to the name, may prepare us for fuller discoveries of a resemblance

II. In his office

Joshua was appointed to lead the Israelites into the promised land

[Moses was certainly intended to represent the law, which was admirably calculated to lead men through the wilderness, but could never bring them into the land of Canaan: one offence against it destroyed all hope of salvation by it^g: it made no provision for mercy: its terms were simply, Do this and live^h: and, for an example of its inexorable rigour, Moses himself was, for one unadvised word, excluded from the land of promise. The office of saving men must belong to another; and, for this reason, it was transferred to Joshua, who had been both appointed to it, and thoroughly qualified by God for the discharge of itⁱ.]

Jesus

^b Numb. xiii. 16.

^c *Jah*, which was prefixed to his name, is the name of God.

^d Acts vii. 45. Heb. iv. 8. ^e Matt. i. 21. ^f Heb. v. 9.

^g Gal. iii. 10.

^h Rom. x. 5.

ⁱ Deut. xxxiv. 9.

Jesus also was commissioned to bring his followers into the Canaan that is above

[He, probably in reference to Joshua, is styled the Captain of our salvation^k: and he appeared to Joshua himself in this very character, proclaiming himself to be the Captain of the Lord's host^l. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," the Lord Jesus Christ came to effect^m. He has been divinely qualified for the work; and, like Joshua, was "encouraged to it, and strengthened in it," by an assurance of God's continual presence, and supportⁿ. He leads his people on from grace to grace, from strength to strength, from victory to victory^o. Nor will he ever desist from his work, till he shall have subdued his enemies, and established his people in their promised inheritance.]

Happily for us the resemblance may be likewise traced

III. In his success

Nothing could oppose any effectual bar to Joshua's progress

[Though Jordan had overflowed its banks, its waters were divided, to open him a path on dry land^p. The impregnable walls of Jericho, merely at the sound of rams horns, were made to fall^q. Confederate kings fled before him^r. City after city, kingdom after kingdom, were subjected to his all-conquering arms: and almost the whole accursed race of Canaanites were extirpated, and destroyed^s. The promised land was divided by him amongst his followers^t: and he appealed to them with his dying breath, that not so much as one, of all the promises that God had given them, had ever failed^u.]

And shall less be said respecting our adorable Emmanuel?

[He "triumphed over all the principalities and powers" of hell; and causes his followers to trample on the necks of their mightiest foes^x. He leads them safely through the swellings of Jordan, when they come to the border of the promised land^y; and, having given them the victory, he divides among them the heavenly inheritance^z. When he comes to number them at last, even though they may have sustained the sorest conflicts, it will be found, that not so much as one of them is lost^a: and he will be able to appeal to the whole assembled

^k Heb. ii. 10.

ⁿ Isai. xlii. 1, 4, 6.

^p Josh. iii. 17.

^q Josh. xii. 7, 24.

^r Josh. xxiii. 14.

^s Isai. xliii. 2.

^t Num. xxxi. 49, with John xvii. 12.

^l Josh. v. 13—15.

^o Ps. lxxxiv. 7. 2 Cor. iii. 18. Rev. vi. 2.

^q Josh. vi. 20.

^r Josh. xi. 23. and xviii. 10.

^s Rom. xvi. 20, with Josh. x. 24.

^u Matt. xxv. 34.

^m Rom. viii. 3.

ⁿ 2 Cor. iii. 18. Rev. vi. 2.

^r Josh. x. 16.

assembled universe, that not so much as one jot or tittle of God's word hath failed of its accomplishment. Thus will all of them be put into possession of "that rest, which remained for them," in the hope and expectation of which they endured the labours of travel, and the fatigues of war^b.]

INFER

1. How earnestly, and how humbly, should all submit themselves to Jesus!

[Notwithstanding Joshua's commission was utterly to destroy the inhabitants of that sinful land, yet he both spared the Gibeonites, and made a league with them, when they humbled themselves before him^c; he, moreover, gave a special charge respecting the preservation of the harlot Rahab, who, in faith, had concealed his spies^d. But resistance to him was vain: there were none that could stand before him. Thus must all thine enemies, O Lord, perish, if they do not prostrate themselves before thee in humility and faith. Shall we not then believingly receive his messengers, and, *in the use of his appointed means*, expect his mercy? Shall we not go and make a covenant with him, and yield up ourselves, with unreserved submission, to his commands? Yes: and if this conduct provoke the world to combine against us, we will call him in to our aid, and despise the assaults of earth and hell^e.]

2. How confidently may the very weakest Christians go forth to their future conflicts!

[Though Canaan was promised to the Israelites, yet they were all to fight for it: so neither is heaven to be gained without many severe conflicts. But what have we to fear, when we have such a Captain? "If he be for us, who can be against us?" Did he ever yet suffer one of his faithful followers to perish? If they have been wounded, has he not healed their wounds? If they have fainted, has he not renewed their strength? Has he not made them conquerors, yea, "more than conquerors^f?" What then, though we have mighty Anakims to contend with, and their fortresses be walled up to heaven? Let us "be strong and very courageous;" and we shall find that "the weapons of prayer and faith, though weak and contemptible to a carnal eye, are mighty through God to the casting down of strong holds, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God^g." Let us then "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Let us "put on the whole armour of God^h." And let

^b Heb. iv. 1, 9, 11.

^c Josh. x. 4.

^d Eph. vi. 10, 11.

^e Josh. ix. 15.

^f Rom. viii. 37.

^g Josh. vi. 22, 25.

^h 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

let us look forward with confidence to the joyful period, when we shall receive our portion in the promised land, "the land that floweth with milk and honey."]

CXII. DAVID A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. *I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David: he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them: I the Lord have spoken it.*

THERE is nothing so comforting to an afflicted soul, as to contemplate the promises of God: indeed they were given to us for this very purpose, that they might be our support and consolation in the time of trouble. The same may be observed with respect to the prophecies that relate to Christ: they were delivered to the church in seasons of peculiar trial, as encouragements to the saints to hold fast their profession. It was under circumstances of this nature, that the glorious prophecy before us was revealed. Both the ecclesiastical and civil governors of Israel had greatly oppressed the poor, and especially the godly: but God afforded them seasonable support, by declaring, that he would not only espouse their cause, but would raise up to them a Shepherd, and a Governor of a very different description, even the Messiah himself, who should redress all their wrongs, and bring them into the possession of perfect happiness.

Such being the occasion of the words, we proceed to enquire

I. Why Christ is so often called David

It is undoubtedly the Messiah that is here called "David"

[David himself had been dead many hundred years; nor has there been any other person after him, to whom this appellation was ever given. But Christ is frequently spoken of in the prophets by the name of David^a; and to him the characters, here annexed to that name, most eminently belong.]

He is called by that name, because David was a very distinguished type of him

[David

^a Jer. xxx. 9. Hos. iii. 5.

[David was chosen by God from a very low state, and was anointed to be King over Israel. He was also made a prophet of the Most High; and under the influence of the holy Spirit, often spake as actually personating the Messiah himself. Many parts of his heavenly compositions, though *apparently* intended respecting himself, have indeed no reference to himself at all, except as he was a type of Christ, in whom the very things predicted were *literally* fulfilled^b. And so exact was the correspondence between the type and antitype, that Christ, springing “from the root of Jesse,” “as a root out of the dry ground^c,” and “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows^d,” was born (according to the predictions) in the very place of David’s nativity^e; was constituted a prophet like unto him, and was raised to “the throne of his father David^f.”]

His resemblance to David will yet further appear, if we consider

II. What offices are here assigned him

Like his honoured representative, he was to be

1. A shepherd

[David, in his early youth, followed the occupation of a shepherd, and repeatedly exposed his life to most imminent danger in defence of the flock entrusted to him^g. And, after he became a king, he still, figuratively at least, sustained the same office, “feeding his people, according to the integrity of his heart, and *guiding* them by the skilfulness of his hands^h.” But he, whom David typified, was, in a far more exalted sense, “the great shepherd of the sheepⁱ.” He not only exposed, but willingly sacrificed, his life for his sheep^k: nor can a juster description of him be conveyed in words, than that, which is given us in the preceding context^l: He is incessantly “seeking the lost, bringing back that which has been driven away, binding up the broken, strengthening the sick,” and administering to the necessities of all.]

2. A Prince

[The promises of David’s exaltation were at last fulfilled, and he was seated on the throne, to which he had been appointed. He did indeed meet with innumerable conflicts in his way to it: at one time, we see him encountering Goliath; at another, fleeing from the murderous attacks of Saul: yea, he was even driven from his kingdom by his own nearest relative, and treasonably sacrificed by his most familiar friend; in

^b Ps. xxii. 18, & lxix. 21. ^c Isai. xi. 1. & liii. 2. ^d Ps. xlv. 7.

^e Mic. v. 2, with Matt. ii. 5, 6.

^f Luke i. 32.

^g 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35.

^h Ps. lxxviii. 70—72.

ⁱ Heb. xiii. 20.

^k John x. 11.

^l Ver. 11—16.

in consequence of which, he fled weeping over that very brook Kidron, over which his Lord passed afterwards to crucifixion. But God preserved him from every danger, and made him "Head over Israel," and "the heathen" too^m. Thus it was also that Christ was raised to his throne: He had scarcely made his appearance in the world before he became an object of Herod's jealousy, and was forced to seek an asylum in a heathen landⁿ. On many occasions he escaped only by a miraculous exertion of his own almighty power^o. When his time was come, he was betrayed by one of his own disciples, who, like David's treacherous friend, speedily went and hanged himself^p. But, infinitely beyond David, was Christ "a man of sorrows;" "his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Yet, after all, "the stone which the builders refused, was made the head-stone of the corner." He was "exalted to be a prince and a saviour^q," "the utmost ends of the earth were given him for his dominion;" and "of his kingdom there shall be no end^r."]

Nor are we uninterested in these offices; as will appear, if we enquire

III. What is the state of those on whose behalf he executes them

To have God "a God unto us," comprehends all that men or angels can receive

[It is not possible for a finite imagination to conceive the full import of such an expression as this. It must certainly imply, that he will protect us from all kinds of evil, and fill us with the richest consolation both in this world, and the world to come: every perfection, which God himself possesses, shall be improved for our present benefit, and all his glory shall be enjoyed for our eternal happiness.]

This will most assuredly be our portion, if we be numbered among the flock of Christ

[It is to these that the promise in the text must be confined. As for the ungodly world, they have no prospect whatever of such a blessing: there is not one word in all the holy oracles, that warrants such an hope. But to those who believe in Christ the promises are made: to those, who have been brought into his fold, who feed in his pastures, and yield up themselves unfeignedly to his dominion, God has pledged himself to be their God. He himself expatiates upon
this

^m Ps. xviii. 43.

ⁿ Matt. ii. 14, 15.

^o Luke iv. 29, 30.

^p Ps. lxix. 25. and cix. 8. with Acts i. 20. shew Ahitophel to be in this a type of Judas.

^q Acts iv. 11. and v. 31.

^r Ps. ii. 8. Luke i. 33.

this privilege in this view, and almost in the very words of the text^s; and assures us in the most solemn manner, that all, who seek him in his appointed way, shall be partakers of it.]

INFER

1. How deeply are we concerned to become the sheep of Christ!

[Could we obtain mercy with God in any other way, there were the less reason for concerning ourselves about an interest in Christ. But in vain shall we attempt to ingratiate ourselves in the divine favour by any other means: we must obey the voice of that good shepherd, and follow him: we must submit ourselves to the government of that prince, and become his faithful subjects: then, and then only, will God acknowledge us as his people, and give himself to us as our God. Let us not then neglect the Saviour any more: let us rather go to him with one accord: let us entreat him, to take us under his charge; and thus endeavour to become "one fold under one shepherd." Then, whatever may be the fate of those, who are at a distance from him, we shall be delivered from our spiritual enemies, and, having suffered awhile with him, shall in due time be glorified together^t.]

2. How safely may we trust the promises of God!

[Many hundred years before the coming of Christ was this prophecy delivered: and how exactly was it accomplished in every thing that respected *Him*! He was appointed our shepherd; he was exalted to be our prince; and to this very hour has he executed these offices in their fullest extent. Shall we doubt then whether the prophecy shall be fulfilled as it respects *us*? Will God refuse to be our God, when we desire to be his people? Or will he be only *nominally* our God, and withhold from us the blessings that are implied in that relation? Has he done what is so infinitely greater, and will he decline to do the less? Has he not "delivered up for us his only Son, and will he not with him also freely give us all things?" We cannot doubt. He says, "*I the Lord hath spoken it*:" we may be certain, therefore, that he will perform; since "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Let us trust then, and not be afraid; and in due season we shall enjoy, "according to his covenant, the sure mercies of David^x."]

^s Ezek. xxxvii. 24—28.

^t Rom. viii. 32.

[†] Rom. viii. 17.

^x Isai. lv. 3.

CXIII. SOLOMON A TYPE OF CHRIST.

1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10. *Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be called Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.*

IF God have any great work to do, he will raise up fit instruments for himself, and qualify them for executing his will. Nor will he make use of such persons only as, of their own minds, covet the employment, but oftentimes such as are either averse to it, or unconcerned about it. Has he ordained to bring his people out of Egypt, or to gather to himself a people from the Gentile world? He raises up a Moses, or converts a Paul, that, as his agents, they may accomplish his gracious purpose. Thus when David was solicitous to build an house for God, and had made great preparations for it, God forbade him to carry into effect his designs; and conferred that honour on Solomon, his son. While we adore this exercise of his sovereign will, we are led to contemplate a mystery veiled under this dispensation, and to trace the resemblance which was by this means produced between Solomon, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though the words of the text in their literal sense relate to Solomon, yet they have undoubtedly a farther reference to Christ; of whom Solomon was a type,

I. In his dearness to God

Solomon was eminently favoured of the divine Being

[He was a subject of prophecy before he was born; and was called "Jedidiah," by God's special appointment, in token of the peculiar love which God bore towards him^a. His mental endowments were such as never had before been possessed by fallen man. His knowledge of natural philosophy was wonderfully extensive^b; and his qualifications for administering the affairs of his kingdom were so perfect, as to be the envy, and admiration, of all who knew him^c. He was honoured with repeated visions of the Almighty, and with most signal evidences of divine acceptance^d. Throughout his life

^a 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25.

^e 1 Kin. iii. 16—28.

^b 1 Kin. iii. 12. and iv. 29—34.

^d 1 Kin. ix. 2.

life did God regard him as a beloved child; nor were the judgments inflicted on him toward the close of life for his awful declensions, to be considered in any other light, than as paternal chastisements: for though we are not expressly told that he ever was recovered from his lewdness and idolatries, we cannot but hope that he became a real penitent, and died, as once he had lived, "beloved of the Lord^e."]

But Jesus was, infinitely beyond all others, the beloved of the Father

[Jesus had been a subject of prophecy, not for a few years merely, but from the foundation of the world. The name, Emmanuel, was given him many hundred years before he became incarnate; and He was called Jesus, by the angel, before his conception in the womb^f. Thrice by an audible voice from heaven did God proclaim him his "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." As for the endowments of his mind, he not only had the spirit of wisdom and understanding resting upon him^g, but all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in him^h, so that "he spake as never man spake." So perfectly was he qualified for every part of his regal office, that "Righteousness was the very girdle of his loins," with which he was always girt for the discharge of his dutyⁱ. And it is worthy of particular notice, that the very words of the text, which confessedly point out Solomon as a son of God, are quoted, by an inspired apostle, as referring to Christ, and as declaring his superiority to all both in heaven and earth^k. While therefore, with the apostle, we consider Solomon as a type of Christ, we learn to entertain the most exalted thoughts of Christ, as "the brightness of his Father's glory."]

We may observe a further resemblance of Solomon to Jesus

II. In the office assigned him

It was to Solomon that God assigned the honour of building an house for his name

[David had shed much blood in the course of the many wars in which he had been engaged; and, though he had done this both by the direction and assistance of God himself, yet it unfitted him, in God's estimation, for building the temple. But Solomon, whose very name imported *Peace*, and who was to have rest on every side, was more fit to represent "the Prince of Peace," and more at leisure to execute so great a work. Him therefore did God prefer: nor could any man

* It is most probable that the book of Ecclesiastes was written in consequence of his restoration to the divine favour.

^f Isai. vii. 14. Matt. i. 21.

^g Isai. xi. 1—3.

^h Col. ii. 3.

ⁱ Isai. xi. 5.

^k Comp. 1 Chron. xvii. 13. with Heb. i. 5.

man prove himself more worthy of the employment. He entered on his work with zeal and piety; and, having finished the noblest edifice that ever the world beheld, and supplied it with most costly furniture in every part, he consecrated it in a solemn and public manner to Jehovah.]

But there is a far more glorious house which Christ alone erects

[The temple of Solomon was only a shadow of another temple, the church of God, in which God dwells, not by any visible symbol of his presence, but by his quickening, comforting, and sanctifying Spirit. Of this temple we ourselves are, as it were, the stones, hewn out by the Lord himself; fitted by him for the place we are designed to occupy; and so disposed by him, that "all the building fitly framed together may grow unto an holy temple in the Lord¹." Moreover, Christ is declared, both by prophets and apostles, to be the founder and finisher of his house^m. And how infinitely does it exceed, both in beauty and magnificence, the structure by which it was typified! *That* was composed, like other buildings, of earthly and perishable materials; *this* is composed of lively stones, built upon a living foundation-stone, and cemented, in every part, by the Spirit of the living Godⁿ: *That* was enriched with gold and silver; but *this* with all the gifts and graces of the Spirit, yea, with the "unsearchable riches of Christ" himself.]

Perhaps in nothing was Solomon a more glorious type of Christ than

III. In the peacefulness and perpetuity of his kingdom

Very remarkable was the peace and prosperity of Solomon's reign

[God had either put down all his enemies, or disposed their hearts to peace and amity; so that, till Solomon had departed from the Lord, and thereby provoked his displeasure, his kingdom enjoyed uninterrupted tranquillity. And though, for his transgressions, the ten tribes were rent from his immediate successor, and ever afterwards continued separate, yet the kingdom of Judah was transmitted to his posterity, and preserved in his family, as long as the kingly government itself existed.]

This however was a very faint image of what exists in the kingdom of Christ

[It is true, that the church has never yet enjoyed much *outward* peace: for though it has often been free from those bloody persecutions, with which it has at some times been harassed, yet it has never ceased for one moment to be an object

¹ Eph. ii. 21.

^m Zec. iv. 9. and vi. 12, 13. with Heb. iii. 3. 6.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

of reproach, and abhorrence, amidst an ungodly world. Still, however, may we justly speak of the peacefulness of Christ's kingdom, since all his subjects have peace with God, and in their own consciences, even a peace that passeth all understanding^o. And there is a time coming, when the enmity of the carnal heart shall be slain; and all mankind, brought into one blessed family, shall live in harmony with each other, "the wolf lying down with the lamb, and the lion eating straw with the ox; there shall be none to hurt, or destroy, in all God's holy mountain^p." Of this kingdom too there shall be no end: for though the present mode of administering it shall be changed^q, (there being no more occasion for a Mediator, when all the saints shall be glorified) yet shall he, who now sits upon the throne of David, reign over Israel for ever and ever^r.]

REFLECTIONS

1. How great and glorious a person must Christ be!

[We justly admire Solomon on account of the singular honour, which God put upon him: but what were the endowments of his mind, the grandeur of his works, or the stability of his kingdom, when compared with the excellencies of the King of Zion? Surely they are but as darkness that renders Emmanuel's light more visible. Let us then fix our eyes on our adorable Saviour; and learn from the faint glimmering of the brightest star, to admire the infinitely brighter glories of the Sun of Righteousness.]

2. How happy are the subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom!

[The Queen of Sheba, filled with wonder at what she saw and heard in the court of Solomon, exclaimed, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom^s." But how incomparably happier must they be, who stand in the presence of Jesus, and hear his voice; and not only behold, but participate, his glory? Believer, know thy privileges, and learn to estimate them aright. And let all earthly glory be despised by thee as not worth a thought, in comparison of that which thou already possessest, and shalt possess, when all the kingdoms of this world have vanished away.]

3. How inexcusable are they who neglect the Saviour!

[Our Lord warned his hearers, that the Queen of the South would rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them, because she went from the very ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; whereas they, when they had One greater

^o Isai. liv. 13. Ps. lxxii. 7. ^p Ps. lxxii. 10, 11. Isai. xi. 6—9.

^q 1 Cor. xv. 28. ^r Luke i. 32, 33. Isai. ix. 7. ^s 1 Kin. x. 8.

greater than Solomon in the midst of them, despised and rejected him^t. And will she not in a still greater degree condemn us, who, even while we profess ourselves the followers of Christ, shew no love to his person, no admiration of his glory, no zeal for his honour? Shall not we perish under a most aggravated load of guilt, when, under the meridian light of the gospel, we prefer darkness to light, and the service of sin to the service of our Lord? May God the Spirit come down to convince us of our sin, and effectually subdue us to the obedience of faith!]

^t Matt. xii. 42.

CXIV. JONAH A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Matt. xii. 39—41. *But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

UNREASONABLE and wicked men are ready to complain of want of evidence, when they neither attentively consider the means of conviction, that are afforded them, nor act agreeably to the convictions, that are already impressed upon their minds. This was eminently the character of the Jews in our Lord's days. They had a right indeed to expect, that their religion, which had been confirmed by so many miracles, should not be superseded by any religion, which did not exhibit the same credentials. But the miracles wrought by our Lord were so numerous, so plain, and evident, that his enemies, unable to question the reality of them, ascribed them to the agency of Satan. Yet the Jews still demanded of him a sign, and, to satisfy their incredulity, he must give them "a sign from heaven^a." It is to persons of this description that our Lord replies in the words before us; telling them, that no different kind of sign should be given them, till his resurrection; and, that

^a Luke xi. 16, 29.

that the repenting Ninevites would in the last day condemn their obstinacy and unbelief.

The text naturally leads us to shew

I. Wherein Jonah was a type of Christ

Whatever agreement there is between the histories of Jonah and of Christ, the *leading* points, wherein the former typified our Lord, are two :

1. His miraculous restoration to dry land after having been three days confined in the belly of a fish

[This was doubtless a wonderful event ; that he should be preserved three days in the belly of a fish, *unhurt* ; and that, after so long a continuance in that situation, the fish, which seemed destined for his destruction, should be the instrument of his preservation ! To this, under God, we must ascribe the efficacy of his word at Nineveh ; for our Lord tells us, that, by this means, he was made “ a sign to the Ninevites.” What means they had of ascertaining the fact itself, we do not exactly know ; but they evidently had not the smallest doubt respecting the truth of it ; and therefore they received his message as coming immediately from God.

Now in this he was evidently a type of Christ. Our Lord having, like Jonah, been voluntarily delivered up to death for the salvation of others, was confined in the heart of the earth. The term of his imprisonment there was the same with that of Jonah’s continuance in the fish’s belly ; yet *he “ saw no corruption ;”* and, at the appointed time, he burst the bands of death (of which it was not possible he should be holden) and thus became a sign to the Jewish nation^b. On this he laid the whole stress of his Messiahship, while he was yet ministering among his countrymen ; and, after the event had taken place, he gave so many, and such convincing, evidences of the fact, as to leave no possibility of doubt respecting his divine mission : this therefore was made the very corner-stone of Christianity ; and his sending down of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in consequence of his resurrection, was such “ a sign from heaven ” as must leave unbelievers without excuse to all eternity.]

2. His successful preaching consequent upon it

[The effect of Jonah’s preaching stands perhaps unrivalled from the foundation of the world. The large and populous city instantly received the word ; and though Gentiles by nature, began to call upon Jehovah ; so that, from the king upon his throne to the very meanest of his subjects, they all humbled themselves before him in sackcloth and ashes ; nor
did

^b Luke xi. 30.

did they cease from their cries, till the wrath of God was averted from them.

And must not this event lead our minds to Jesus, who is no less "a light to lighten the Gentiles, than he is the Glory of his people Israel?" His ministry among the Jews indeed was attended with small success, though ultimately "they shall be again ingrafted on their own stock:" but how rapid, how extensive, has been the effect of his word among the Gentiles! Many myriads have already turned from idols to serve the living and true God; and in due season the whole Gentile world shall flock to his standard^c, and "all flesh behold the salvation of God."]

But notwithstanding this honour put upon Jonah, it will be proper to notice

II. His inferiority to him whom he typified

Though we are disposed to cast a veil over the infirmities of God's servants, yet the peculiarity of Jonah's character, no less than the very words of the text, requires that his inferiority to the Saviour should be strongly marked. We may observe it

1. In his office and character

[Jonah was indeed a prophet of the most high God; but he had as great corruptions as could well consist with a converted state. The whole of his conduct, from first to last, indicated a proud, peevish, discontented, uncharitable, and rebellious disposition; so that it is even a great stretch of charity to believe, that he had any piety at all. But the blessed Jesus was free from every species and degree of sin; and was no other than the Messiah himself, even the very Son of God, "Jehovah's Fellow," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." Methinks, therefore, he did not arrogate much to himself, when he said, "Behold a greater than Jonas is here."]

2. In his manner of executing his office

[Jonah executed the prophetic office among the ten tribes^d; but we know nothing of his spirit, except from the book which bears his name. And here we see, that he did not enter on his office without great reluctance, fleeing from God, in order to avoid an embassy, which he was afraid would be attended with personal danger, or disgrace. When he was in the midst of the storm, which endangered the vessel wherein he was sailing, he, a professor of the true religion, he, a prophet of Jehovah, he, who was the occasion of the storm, was sleeping, while the heathen sailors were crying to their gods; and he was reproached for his supineness by the very heathens themselves.

^c Isai. xi. 10.

^d 2 Kings xiv. 25.

themselves^e. After God himself had interposed to mark him as the occasion of the storm, so that he could conceal his guilt no longer, he confessed his wickedness, and acknowledged to the crew, that the only way of saving the ship, was, to cast him overboard. This done, a fish was prepared to swallow him; and constrained to deliver him safely upon dry land. After this, we might hope, he had attained a better spirit; but alas! though compelled to deliver his message, he preferred his own honour before the salvation of a million souls; instead of once interceding for them, he waited with anxious expectation to see his word fulfilled, and even quarrelled with God for extending his mercy to them^f.

How different was the conduct of our adorable Jesus! He willingly left the bosom of his Father, to become a messenger to our guilty world^g. So far from wishing to avoid disgrace or danger, he gladly submitted to the accursed death of the cross, and “*gave his own life a ransom for many.*” Instead of sleeping while others prayed, he continued whole nights in prayer for those, who were insensible of their danger; and, instead of grieving at the salvation of those who received him, he wept over the impenitence of those who rejected him^h. All concern for himself was lost in his concern for others. And his restoration to life, which was *effected by his own almighty power*, was made the means of more abundant and effectual exertions on behalf of those, to whom he was sent. And the more his efforts were crowned with success, the more did he glorify God on the behalf of those, who obtained mercy.]

3. In the success with which he executed it

[Jonah prevailed to the *outward reformation* and *temporal preservation*, of one single city——— But Jesus does, and will, prevail to the *spiritual renovation*, and *everlasting Salvation* of a whole world——— How exalted is he in this view, and how worthy of our highest praise!]

We may OBSERVE from this subject

1. How certainly is Christ the true Messiah!

[The Ninevites knew for certain the divine mission of Jonah, by means of his miraculous deliverance from the fish's belly. How evidently then is “Christ declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the deadⁱ!” Let then every word of his, by whomsoever it be delivered, “be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God———”]

2. How inexcusable are they, who continue impenitent under the preaching of the gospel!

[Jonah

^e Jonah i. 5, 6.

^f Ib. iv. 2—5.

^g Ps. xl. 7—9.

^h Luke xix. 41.

ⁱ Rom. i. 4.

[Jonah simply denounced the vengeance of God against the Ninevites, without making them any offer of mercy, or even intimating, that there was any possibility that the sentence might be reversed; yea, and without so much as working one single miracle in confirmation of his word: yet they, though heathens, trembled at the very first denunciations of God's wrath, and set themselves to repent and turn from their sins, upon the slightest hope that *peradventure* God might turn from his fierce anger^k. How then ought *we* to seek the Lord, who have not merely temporal ruin, but eternal condemnation, denounced against us; who, besides this, have promises of mercy also set before us, to encourage our repentance; and both the threatenings and the promises confirmed by ten thousand miracles! Surely "the Ninevites will rise up in judgment against us at the last day, if we continue obdurate" under such means as are used to reclaim us.]

3. How certainly may they expect mercy, who repent and believe in Christ!

[We have no reason to think, that the repentance of the Ninevites was genuine and abiding: it is more probable that it resembled that of Ahab, both in its nature and duration^l. Still, however, it was the means of preserving all of them from the threatened calamities. And shall not true repentance, accompanied with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, avail for the salvation of our souls? Will that God, whom Jonah reproached for the unbounded extent of his grace and mercy, "cast out any who come to him by Jesus Christ^m?" We need not fear: it is not a *peradventure*, but a certainty, that God "will save them to the uttermost." Let us then seek the Lord in his appointed way, that we may be monuments of his mercy to all eternity.]

^k Jonah iii. 5—9.

^l 1 Kings xxi. 27—29.

^m John vi. 37.

CXV. ELIAKIM A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Isai. xxii. 24. *They shall hang upon him all the glory of his Father's house.*

IN the various changes that take place in human governments, or in the persons who are to be entrusted with the supreme authority, the hand of God ought to be continually acknowledged: whoever be the instruments, or whatever be the means, of effecting those changes, we must look through the second causes to God, as the first great Cause, who ordereth all things after the counsel of his own will, and makes use of men as his agents, to convey blessings to a nation, or to inflict his just judgments

upon it. But, in his dispensations towards the Jews, there was often some mystery concealed, where we should have observed nothing but an ordinary occurrence. This was the case with respect to the deposition of Shebna, and the substitution of Eliakim in his place, as first minister of state under Hezekiah. Eliakim seems to have been raised as a type of Christ: the agreement between him and Christ is strongly marked in the passage before us,

I. In his succession to one who had abused his office

[Shebna was a proud, vain-glorious man, far more intent on aggrandizing himself and his family, than on executing the arduous duties of his station ^a. God therefore moved Hezekiah to dismiss him, and inspired Isaiah, not only to predict his degradation, but to foretel the elevation of *Eliakim to his post and office*. Thus was our Lord appointed to succeed the governors of the Jewish nation, who, both in the civil and ecclesiastical departments, had abused their trust, and rendered themselves unworthy to be continued in it. Humiliating in the extreme are the descriptions, which the prophet gives of the rulers both in church and state ^b: and the time was coming, when God would fulfil his word, in “raising up in their place a faithful priest, who should do all his will, and another king, who should reign over the house of David for ever ^c.” “With their robe was He to be clothed, and with their girdle was he to be strengthened; and their government was to be committed into his hands ^d,” and *this* too, not only according to the commandment of God, but by the immediate agency of his overruling Providence ^e.]

II. In the authority committed to him

[As Joseph in former times had been invested with all the insignia of office by Pharaoh, king of Egypt ^f, so was Eliakim to have “the key of the house of David laid upon his shoulder, and to exercise the most unlimited authority:” nor was he to be removed, like Shebna, whose boasted security would soon fail him ^g; but he was to be “a nail fastened in a sure place.”]

Our blessed Lord applies to himself the very words here used in reference to Eliakim ^h; thereby shewing, that Eliakim was indeed a type of him; that, what was spoken of Eliakim

only

^a Ver. 15, 16.

^b Isai. i. 5. and lvi. 10—12.

^c 1 Sam. ii. 30, 35. and Jer. xxiii. 2, 5.

^d Comp. ver. 21, with Rev. i. 13. Isai. xi. 5. and ix. 6.

^e As this was marked in the case of Eliakim (ver. 19—21.) so in that of Christ by the raising him from the dead, and utterly destroying the Jewish polity.

^f Gen. xli. 41—44.

^g Ver. 25 refers to Shebna, and not to Eliakim.

^h Rev. iii. 7.

only in a figure, was really, and in the strictest sense, applicable to himself; and that, as Eliakim's power, so more especially was HIS, *uncontrollable*, and *unalterable*. "All power in heaven and in earth is committed unto Christ¹:" in every thing that relates to the kingdom of nature or of grace, "he openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." None are exalted, or disgraced, either in this world, or the world to come, but agreeably to the orders which He issues: nor can any, even in the smallest degree, resist his will: "He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; nor can any stay his hand, or say to him, What doest thou?" Nor will the lapse of ages effect any change on him: "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^k:" "He is a nail fastened in a sure place:" seated on his holy hill of Zion, He laughs at the impotent combinations of men and devils, and has all his enemies in derision^l. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed^m."]

III. In the benefits resulting from his administration

[A wise and righteous governor is a rich blessing, as well to the prince who appoints him, as to the people whom he governs. Such was Eliakim; who was most probably of the royal seed; since it would not otherwise have been any virtue in him to seek with so much diligence the exaltation of his father's house.

But in what an infinitely higher degree do the benefits of Christ's administration appear!

Was Eliakim "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah?" What a blessing is Christ also *to the world at large*! As, in a state, all are benefited by a wise administration, though many are insensible of the blessings they enjoy; so the world is much indebted to the revelation which Christ has given us, and to his wise government of the universe, though they deny his providence, and despise his grace.

Was Eliakim "a nail, on which all the vessels of his father's house hung" in safety? What security does Christ afford *to his dependants in particular*! The various orders and degrees of Christians are elsewhere compared to vessels of various kindsⁿ; and every one of them, from the greatest to the least, hangs upon him: were HE to fall, they would perish; but as long as HE stands, they shall be upheld; "because HE liveth they shall live also^o."

Was Eliakim "a glorious throne to his father's house?" Jesus also, by his righteous administration, advances the glory of

¹ Matt. xxviii. 18.

^m Dan. vii. 14.

^k Heb. xiii. 8.

ⁿ 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21.

^l Ps. ii. 1—4.

^o John xiv. 19.

of *his heavenly Father*. In ascribing to Jesus the power and dominion over all, we do not derogate from the Father's honour, but add to it^p. His mediatorial office he holds from the Father, and improves it, in every instance, for his glory. Whether he open or shut, whether he kill or save alive, every perfection of the Deity receives brighter lustre from the dispensation; and gives reason for unbounded thankfulness to God, for having "committed all judgment to his Son," and "laid our help upon One so Mighty^q."]]

We cannot IMPROVE this subject better, than by learning from it

1. To renounce all creature-dependence

[Great as the power of Shebna was, both he, and all his dependants, were brought down in God's appointed time; and the vanities in which he had gloried, became monuments of his shame, and means of perpetuating his disgrace^r. Thus will it be with all, who trust in an arm of flesh. God has denounced a curse against them^s; and, though through the forbearance of God, it may be awhile delayed, it will surely come at last; and all, wherein we trusted, will turn to our confusion: our wisdom will become folly; our strength, weakness; our righteousness, as filthy rags^t. We may dream of being "as a nail fastened in a sure place;" but if we rely on any thing of our own, our hopes will be disappointed, and our expectations will perish. Let us not then lean to our own understanding, or depend on our strength, or trust in our own righteousness: we must be empty in ourselves, if we would be filled by God; for it is "the hungry alone whom he filleth with good things; the full and the rich he will send empty away:" "He will resist the proud; and give grace only to the humble^u."]]

2. To trust in the Lord with our whole hearts

[Jesus is indeed "a nail fastened in a sure place;" and able to bear the weight of the whole universe. He is exalted by the hand of God himself on purpose that He may "be a Prince and a Saviour" unto us. And, if we rely on him, he is "able to save us to the uttermost." Only let our trust in him be entire, (exactly like that of a vessel on a nail) and we may rest assured, that all, who so hang on him, shall be "the glory of his Father's house." As there is no other support for sinful man, so neither is there any fear of disappointment to those who trust in him. Let none then imagine themselves so great as not to need his support; or deem themselves so insignificant, that they shall not obtain it, or think themselves

^p Phil. ii. 11.

^q Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^r Ver. 18.

^s Jer. xvii. 5.

^t 1 Cor. i. 19, Isai. lxiv. 6.

^u Luke i. 52, 53. Jam. iv. 6.

selves in such perilous circumstances, that He cannot uphold them. "Every vessel, from the largest flagon to the smallest cup," must owe its preservation to him alone; and by him shall all be saved, if they do but "cleave to him with full purpose of heart."]

CXVI. ZERUBBABEL A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Zech. iv. 7. *Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubabel thou shalt become a plain.*

OUR eyes are generally fixed more on the creature than on God—

Hence we are apt to entertain many unnecessary fears—

Nor are we unfrequently diverted by them from the path of duty—

This was the case with the Jews when rebuilding their temple—

Cyrus had given them permission to rebuild it—

But they met with opposition from their envious neighbours—

And through this they were intimidated and disheartened—

But God encouraged them with an assurance of success—Ver. 6, 7.

We may notice

I. The difficulties that obstruct the building of God's spiritual temple

The temple at Jerusalem was typical of that, which God erects *visibly in the world, and invisibly in the hearts of men*^a—

The visible temple of the church has much to obstruct its erection in the world

1. There is an impenetrable hardness in men's hearts

[Men are immersed in ignorance and sin—

They pay little, if any, attention to the word of God—

They set themselves against what is spoken to them in God's name—

Their state seems to destroy all hope that the gospel should spread among them—]

2. There

^a In proof of this, see Eph. ii. 21. and 1 Cor. iii. 16.

2. There is much opposition made to it by all descriptions of people

[Many pretended friends, as well as open enemies, strove to impede the building of the material temple^b—

They sought to prevent it even by means of a legal process^c—

Thus both force and stratagem are used to stop the progress of the gospel—

And the united opposition of all ranks of men seems like an impassable mountain in its way—]

3. Those employed in erecting this spiritual temple are weak and insufficient

[The work might call forth all the wisdom and energy of angels—

But God has put his “treasure into earthen vessels”—

Even St. Paul cried, “Who is sufficient for these things?”—

Much more may inferior ministers adopt his language—

Whoever knows his own insufficiency for so great a work, must often have felt it a source of discouragement, and almost of despondency—]

The invisible temple also which God is erecting in men’s hearts is retarded by many difficulties and obstructions

1. The Christian finds many *outward* impediments

[The terrors and allurements of the world have great influence—

And every Christian is, more or less, beset with these—

Many, after running well for a season, are turned aside by them—

Yea, all find them obstacles very difficult to be surmounted—]

2. He has also many *inward* difficulties to encounter

[The believer still feels sad remains of corruption within him—

These are ever counteracting the efforts of his better principle^d—

And he is often apprehensive that sin will regain its dominion—]

3. Above all, he finds his strength to be perfect weakness

[He has learned by bitter experience, how weak he is—

He has found, how his strongest resolutions have failed him—

Hence

^b Ezra iv. 1—4.

^c Ezra iv. 5.

^d Gal. v. 17.

Hence he is led to fear, that he shall not persevere to the end—]

But whatever obstructions there be to God's work, God will manifest

II. Their inefficacy to stop its progress

God enabled Zerubbabel to proceed in spite of all opposition—

Nor will He suffer any obstacles to counteract his designs—

1. The visible temple of his church shall still be carried on

[In the first ages of Christianity the gospel was victorious—

Neither the lusts nor prejudices of men could withstand its power—

The very persecutions raised against it were overruled by him to promote its progress^e—

Nor did the weakness of those, who preached it, prevent its success—

That promise had then a glorious accomplishment^f—

So now neither open nor secret assaults shall prevail against the church—

Of this we are assured by Him who governs all^g—]

2. The invisible temple also shall be advanced in our hearts

[The work has hitherto been maintained, notwithstanding the most unpromising appearances—

It has often been advanced by the very things which seemed most likely to counteract it—

There is an invisible and Almighty Agent engaged to carry it on^h—

He will fulfil what he has spoken by the prophetⁱ—

Of this comforting truth we may be confidently assured^k—]

INFER

1. In what manner we should *regard* difficulties

[We are apt to exaggerate the difficulties that lie in our way—

But, if we inspected them more narrowly, they would often appear contemptible—

However

^e Acts viii. 1, 4. and Phil. i. 12—14.

^f Ps. lxxii. 16.

^g Matt. xvi. 18.

^h Isai. liv. 17. Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

ⁱ Luke iii. 5.

^k Phil. i. 6.

However great they be, we should not be afraid to address them in the exulting language of the text—

They will always, in the issue, be the means of glorifying Christ—

Let us therefore go forward in dependence on that promise^l—]

2. In what manner we may *overcome* difficulties

[Christ is that Builder of whom Zerubbabel was a type—
Nor is there any thing too hard for him—

The greatest mountains before him will become a plain—

He therefore must be viewed as our All-sufficient Helper—

If we trust in him, we shall never be disappointed—

We shall surely experience the truth of that declaration^m—

To him then let us commit ourselves with thankful adorationⁿ—]

^l “Fear not, thou worm Jacob . . . Thou shalt thresh the mountains.” Isai. xli. 14—16. The whole passage is replete with beauty.

^m Zech. iv. 9.

ⁿ Jude 24, 25.

CXVII. THE PRIVILEGES OF THE JEWS TYPICAL OF THOSE ENJOYED BY TRUE CHRISTIANS.

Rom. ix. 1—4. *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.*

IT is generally thought an office of love to conceal from persons any truths, the recital of which will afford them pain: but true love will rather stimulate us to declare such truths as are necessary to be known, though it will incline us to declare them with the greatest tenderness and circumspection. An admirable pattern presents itself before us in the text. The apostle was about to enter on a subject most offensive to the Jews, but a subject that ought in no wise to be concealed from them, namely, the determination of God to cast off their nation, and to ingraft the Gentiles on the stock. But, as it would be thought that he was actuated only by a spirit of revenge, he declares to them, in the most solemn manner, and appeals to God for the truth of it, that so far from wishing their hurt, he

he was affected with the deepest sorrow on their account; and that there was nothing he would not do or suffer, if it might but be the means of saving them from the impending ruin.

His enumeration of the privileges which they abused, and his pathetic lamentation over them, may well lead us to consider

I. The exalted privileges enjoyed by true Israelites

The Jews, as a nation, were favoured beyond all the nations upon earth

[God honoured them with *an adoption into his family* he regarded them as his children^a, and acted towards them as a father^b. He vouchsafed to them *a symbol of his presence*: the ark, and the shechinah, or bright cloud, upon it, were visible tokens of his presence, and were regarded as the “principal glory” of that distinguished people^c. He “gave” them also from heaven *a revelation of his will*: “the” moral “law” he promulgated in the form of “a covenant,” and wrote with his own finger on two tables of stone^d; the *judicial* law he formed as a code, according to which he himself, and all the magistrates under him, were to govern them; and the *ceremonial* law he instituted for “the service” of his temple, that they might worship him in a becoming manner^e. To all these he added “*a promise*” of his rest, and a continued enjoyment of it, unless they should provoke him by their iniquities to deprive them of it^f.]

But their privileges were only a shadow of those enjoyed by true Israelites

[As, under the Jewish dispensation, “all were not Israel who were of Israel^g,” so, under the gospel, “they, who are Christ’s, are the true seed of Abraham, and heirs according to the promise^h.” Now to those who are “Israelites indeed” belong those infinitely rich blessings, which, *in a figure*, were enjoyed by the carnal Jews. They are really the sons of God, as soon as ever they believe in Christⁱ, and have a spirit of “Adoption” given them whereby they cry, Abba, Father^k. They have God, not merely residing in a bright cloud, but dwelling in their

^a Exod. iv. 22, 23. Jer. xxxi. 9, 10. ^b Deut. xxxii. 6, 10, 13, 14.

^c 1 Sam. iv. 21, 22. Ps. lxxx. 1.

^d The covenant was but *one*: but it is spoken of in the plural number, either because it was given on two tables, or because it was repeatedly published in different forms.

^e Because the sacred oracles were so great a blessing [Deut. iv. 7, 8. Rom. iii. 1, 2.] the apostle speaks of them in three different views.

^f Deut. xxx. 15—20.

^g Rom. ix. 6.

^h Gal. iii. 29.

ⁱ John i. 12. ^j John iii. 1, 2. Eph. ii. 19.

^k Rom. viii. 14, 15.

their own hearts¹, and displaying to them his "glory" in the face of Jesus^m. To them is revealed that "covenant," which is ordered in all things and sureⁿ, together with the whole of their duty both to God and man; so that, by adhering to his directions, they are sure to prove both dutiful citizens, and accepted worshippers. Lastly, they have also exceeding great and precious "promises," comprehending every thing that is good for body and for soul, in time and in eternity^o.]

But, by how much the more exalted our condition under the gospel is, by so much the more may we see

II. The disposition we should manifest towards those who despise these privileges

The expressions used by the apostle admit of different interpretations^p. But, in whatever sense they be taken, they certainly import that

1. We should be deeply concerned about their state

[There were various things which grieved and wounded the apostle's mind, yea, that occasioned him *great* heaviness, and *continual* pangs, like those of a woman in her travail^q: he was much affected, not only with the numbers of those that were rejecting his message, but with the peculiar advantages they had for knowing the truth, the strong obligations which

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 16. ^m 2 Cor. iv. 6. ⁿ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. ^o 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^p Some consider him as saying that he was willing to be excommunicated from the church of God, and to be treated by them even as he was by his enemies: and others, as saying, that he was willing to suffer for them *ὡπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, *after the example of Christ*. But if we take *ἐυχόμεν* in the past tense, instead of obliging the apostle to say, *ἐυχόμεν ἂν*, and if we comprehend the words *ἐυχόμεν γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐν ὧ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι ὡπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ* in a parenthesis, the sense will be far more clear, and all the difficulties that occur on the other construction will be avoided. The sense will then be, I am sorry (for I myself was once in their very condition, and wished to have nothing to do with Christ, which, in fact, was to be accursed from Christ, as much as any of them now do) for my brethren, &c. Compare Gal. iv. 12, in the Greek, "Be ye as I am, for I *was* as ye are." The same idea is more fully expressed Acts xxvi. 9—11. According to this interpretation, the apostle's words are a plain and obvious *reason for his excessive grief*: for, having been in their situation, and knowing from bitter experience the evil of it, he could never think of them without the keenest sensations of sorrow and compassion. If the strength of the expression, "I wished myself *accursed from Christ*," appear to militate against this interpretation, we observe, that the apostle puts the effect for the cause, that is, the ultimate effect of his aversion to Christ for the aversion itself. A similar mode of expression repeatedly occurs in Scripture. See Isa. xxviii. 15. and xxx. 10. See also Acts xiii. 46. and Rev. ii. 24. where the depths of *Satan* import what those *depths* were in reality, and not what the people themselves called them.

^q Ὀδύνη, compare Gal. iv. 19.

their very profession, as God's Israel, laid them under to receive it, and the aggravated guilt under which they must speedily and eternally perish. All these reasons are incomparably stronger as applied to those, who while they call themselves Christians, are unmindful of the privileges they enjoy. Who can think of the many thousands that bear the Christian name, who yet never draw nigh to God with filial affection, never behold the light of his countenance, never lay hold on his covenant of grace, never stay themselves in truth upon his promised mercy; who, I say, can think of these, and not wish that his "head were a fountain of tears to run down for them night and day?" If one soul be of such value, that the whole world can never compensate for the loss of it, how shocking is the thought of millions of souls perishing under such an accumulated load of guilt! Surely no heaviness can be too great, no anguish too abiding, when we are surrounded with such objects, objects despising their own mercies, and "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath."]

2. We should account nothing too much to do or suffer for their salvation

[When God threatened to destroy the whole Jewish nation, and offered to raise up from Moses a nation in their stead, Moses begged, that he himself might be blotted out of the list of God's visible church, rather than that tremendous threatening should be executed^s. And certainly the apostle Paul, whose labours and sufferings for the good of his fellow-creatures were unparalleled^t, would gladly have submitted to any temporal calamity, if it might but operate for the salvation of Israel. And who, that considers what Jesus has done for the salvation of men, does not see the reasonableness of such a disposition? Who does not condemn himself for his want of love to his fellow-immortals, and his want of zeal in their service? If we condemn the world for their supineness, methinks, the people of God have yet more occasion to blush for their own: for, what the world do, they do ignorantly; but they, who are taught of God, can see the state of those around them, and yet too often look upon them, either with cold indifference, or inactive pity. But let every Christian cultivate a better spirit; nor ever be satisfied, till he can appeal to God, and say, "I would endure all things for the elects sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"^u."]

INFER

1. How far are they from a Christian spirit, who not only use no means for the salvation of others, but oppose and thwart them that do! [If

^s Jer. ix. 1.

^t 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

^s Exod. xxxii. 32.

^u 2 Tim. ii. 10.

[If a faithful servant of God exert himself for the good of mankind, how many will cry out against him as officious and fanatical, ostentatious and uncharitable! Who, among the prophets, or apostles, or who, even in the present day, has ever shewn, in the smallest degree, the disposition manifested in the text, without exposing himself to much calumny and contempt? But let the opposers of vital godliness and holy zeal, compare themselves with the apostle, and ask, whether they breathe any thing of his spirit? And let them no longer persist in fighting against God, and destroying their fellow-creatures; but rather turn unto God, that they themselves may be partakers of his proffered mercy.]

2. How earnest should every Christian be in seeking *his own* salvation!

[If we ought to be deeply concerned about the souls of others, and to be willing either to do or suffer any thing, in order to promote their welfare, how much more should we lay to heart our own state, and exercise self-denial for the good of our own souls! If we duly estimated the privileges which God has given us, if we considered the happiness to which an improvement of those privileges would lead, and the misery that will infallibly result from the neglect of them, we should engage with incomparably greater zeal in the work of our salvation; we should make it our meat and drink to do God's will; nor would life with all its joys, or death with all its terrors, be suffered to divert us from the prosecution of our purpose.]

CXVIII. THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS TYPICAL OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

Exod. xvii. 11. *And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.*

IT pleases God, in general, to effect his purposes by certain means; yet the very means he uses are, for the most part, such as tend only to illustrate his power, and to lead our minds up to him as the first great Cause of all. But on no occasion has the truth of this observation more manifestly appeared, than in the history now before us, wherein we are informed, that the success of the Israelites in an engagement with Amalek was made to depend, not on the bravery of the soldiers, or the skill of their commander, but on the holding up of the hands of Moses at a distance from the field of battle.

In discoursing on this remarkable event, we shall consider it as

I. A typical history

The whole history of the Israelites, from their deliverance out of Egypt to their establishment in the land of Canaan, was altogether of a typical nature : but we shall limit our observations to the circumstances now under our consideration.

We may notice then a typical reference

1. In the conflicts which the Israelites maintained

[The Israelites were scarcely come out of Egypt, before they were attacked by the Amalekites, though no provocation had been given on their part. This represented the opposition which the world and Satan make to the true Israelites, as soon as ever they separate themselves from the ungodly, and set their faces towards the promised land. Though they do nothing to merit persecution, yea, though, in every point of view, they are become more excellent and praiseworthy, and desire nothing but to prosecute their journey peaceably through this dreary wilderness, yet are they hated, reviled, persecuted ; nor can they obtain the inheritance prepared for them, without arming themselves for the combat, and “warring a good warfare.”]

2. In the commander under whom they fought

[Joshua was appointed to set the army in array, and lead them out to battle. Now the very name of Joshua is precisely the same with that of Jesus^a, who is “given to us of God to be our leader and commander^b.” He is “the Captain of our salvation,” under whom we are enlisted, and under whose banners we fight. Whether we bear more or less the brunt of the battle, it is He, who appoints us our respective stations ; and it is to Him, that we must look for direction and support. And, while, “as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we endure hardness” at his command, we may depend on him for all necessary provision, and for an abundant share of the spoils of victory.]

3. In the means by which they obtained the victory

[The rod of Moses was that with which he had wrought his wonders in Egypt ; and it was a special emblem of the divine power. This he was to hold up in the sight of Israel on an adjacent hill : and, while he held it up, they prospered ; but when, through infirmity, he let it down, their enemies prevailed against them. Now it is thus that we are to obtain the victory

^a Acts vii. 45. Heb. iv. 8.

^b Isai. lv. 4.

victory against our enemies : we must have our eyes fixed on the power of God exerted in our behalf : as long as we have clear views of this, we shall vanquish every adversary ; but, if at any time this cease to be exalted in our eyes, we shall surely faint and fail.

The lifting up of the hands of Moses may further denote the efficacy of prayer. And it is certain that our success will fluctuate, according as our applications at the throne of grace are continued or relaxed.]

But this history may further be considered as affording us

II. An instructive lesson

It may well teach us

1. That, whatever mercies we have received, we must still expect conflicts

[The Israelites had been brought through the Red Sea, and fed both with manna from heaven, and water from the solid rock : and they might have fondly dreamed of nothing but security and peace : but they were rather called to scenes of difficulty and danger. Thus it is with us, when we commit ourselves to the guidance of the pillar and the cloud. We may think perhaps that, because we are reconciled to God, and made heirs of his kingdom, we are henceforth to enjoy uninterrupted tranquillity : but we shall soon find, that we have to “wrestle ; and that too, not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers.” We may indeed be screened for a season by the good providence of God ; as the Israelites were kept from going through the territory of the Philistines, lest they should be discouraged by the opposition, that they would have met with from that warlike people ; but we are men of war by our very profession ; and, sooner or later, our courage and fidelity will be put to the test. It is through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom ; and we must “fight the good fight of faith, before we can receive the crown of righteousness from the hands of our righteous Judge.”]

2. That we must not despond, though our success for a time should appear doubtful

[The Israelites in this very first encounter were at times repulsed ; and victory was long held in suspense, before it was finally declared in their favour. Thus we must expect, that our enemies, though frequently beaten, will return to the charge, and often threaten our very destruction. But, if wounded, we must apply to Christ for healing ; if faint, we must

must beg him to renew our strength ; if driven before our enemies, we must rally, and resume the contest, ever remembering under whom we fight, and how much depends upon a victorious issue. We must also, like Aaron and Hur, *assist each other* ; holding up each other's hands, and animating each other's hearts ; nor ever terminate our exertions, till God shall scatter all our enemies, and bruise under our feet the vanquished foe.]

3. That a believing use of the appointed means, how inadequate soever, or even useless, they may appear, will be crowned with success at last

[Nothing can be conceived less connected with the event, than the means which were used by Moses ; yet were they necessary : for, if, when through infirmity the use of them was intermitted, the scale of victory was instantly turned in favour of the Amalekites, much more, if he had disregarded them altogether, would the most fatal effects have followed : but the persevering use of them procured at last the desired success. Thus the attending of public ordinances, and waiting upon God in secret, may seem but ill calculated to produce such great effects as are said to depend upon them : but, as the occasional and unallowed neglect of these duties is attended with many painful consequences, so a wilful contempt of them would infallibly terminate in our destruction. On the other hand, a diligent and continued attention to them will and must prevail : our prayer shall go up with acceptance before God, and the word we hear shall prove “ the power of God to the salvation of our souls.” Only let us “ lift up holy hands without doubting,” until the evening of life, and we shall be “ more than conquerors through him that loved us.”]

ADDRESS

1. Those who know nothing of spiritual conflicts

[If they, who are at ease in Zion, and experience no spiritual conflicts, were real Christians, there would be no resemblance at all between them and the Israelites, by whom they were typically represented ; and all that is spoken about the Christian warfare, the armour provided for us, and the General under whom we fight, would be altogether without a meaning. But in vain shall the true Israelites expect peace, as long as there are any Amalekites in the world. Our Lord “ came not to send peace on earth, but a sword :” and though he may, in some instances, cause our enemies to be at peace with us, yet will they never be so much at peace, but that we shall have many to contend with : or, if men should cease from troubling us, we shall have enough, both from Satan and our own lusts, to call forth all our exertions, and to make us fervent in imploring help from God. Let, those then, who feel not these conflicts,

enquire, whether their peace be not the consequence of a captivity to their enemies, instead of a victory over them? Nor let them ever expect to reign with Christ, unless they first enlist under his banners, and fight after his example.]

2. Those who are ready to faint by reason of their conflicts

[Your insufficiency to withstand your enemies often discourages and disquiets you : but the Israelites prevailed, notwithstanding their inexperience in the art of war, because they had God on their side. Fear not then ye, "whose hands are weak, whose knees are feeble, and whose hearts are faint ; for behold your God shall come and save you^d." Behold, his power is now exalted in your sight : look at it ; remember what it has effected in the days of old : and know, that it shall be exerted in your behalf, if you do but trust in it. Nor forget, what a Captain you are fighting under: the world, which molests you, has been overcome by him ; and "the prince of this world has been judged" by him. Fight on then a little longer, assured that you shall ere long put your feet upon the necks of your enemies, and enjoy the fruits of victory for ever and ever.]

^d Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

CXIX. THE JUDGMENTS INFLICTED ON THE ISRAELITES TYPICAL OF THOSE WHICH HANG OVER OUR HEADS.

1 Cor. x. 11. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

THE holy scriptures were not given to the world, to amuse us with an account of past occurrences, but to instruct us in the way to eternal life. Nor are the historical parts less conducive to this end, than the preceptive ; since they shew us, in a striking view, the characters of them that are saved, and of them that perish. The history of the Israelites would be entertaining as a romance ; but, as an exemplification of God's dealings with his church, it is inestimable. Hence the apostle expresses great concern that the Corinthian church should be acquainted with the things that had happened to the Jewish nation ; in order that they themselves might be on their guard,

lest, resembling the Jews in their conduct, they should also resemble them in their fate.

Let us consider

I. The typical events here specified

The Jews, notwithstanding the mercies vouchsafed to them, perished in the wilderness for their iniquities

[Great, exceeding great, were the favours conferred upon them: they were brought, under the immediate direction of God, through the Red Sea, and were baptized thereby into the covenant which God made with them by Moses. They were also sustained by food miraculously afforded them, food, not carnal only, but "spiritual," if spiritually improved ^a.

But, instead of following the Lord fully, "they forgot God their Saviour," and addicted themselves to idolatry, to fornication, to distrust and murmuring ^b.

For these, and other impieties, the heavy wrath of God came upon them; and two only, of all the adults who had come out of Egypt, were suffered to enter into the promised land.]

In this view they were intended as types and ensamples ^c to us

[St. Peter mentions the judgments inflicted on fallen angels, the antediluvian world, and the cities of the plain, as exemplifying those which should come upon all, who at any period, should live and die in an ungodly state ^d. St. Jude, in addition to those instances, mentions also the Israelites, who perished in the wilderness ^e. The former might properly represent the people, who are wholly ignorant of God; the latter may more particularly characterize those, who profess religion: and the disappointment, which they experienced in consequence of their sins, was typical of that, which all must experience, who profess to have been called with an holy calling, and yet walk unworthy of their profession. In them we see that the greater our privileges, the heavier, if we abuse them, will be our condemnation.]

Being so deeply interested in the events recorded concerning them, we should consider attentively

II. The admonitions they give us

The Jewish dispensation closed, and the Christian dispensation commenced, in the Apostolic age: and, this being the last that ever shall be given to the world, we,
who

^a Ver. 1—4.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 4—6.

^b Ver. 7—10.

^c Τύποι.

^e Jude 5.

who live under it, may be said to live in the concluding period of the world.

Now the foregoing events admonish us

1. Not to rest in a mere profession of religion

[It was to no purpose that the Israelites called themselves the people of God, while they were unmindful of the obligations which such a profession entailed upon them. While they called God and Abraham their father, they were, like their descendants also, children of the wicked one^f. Thus it will be in vain for us to call ourselves Christians, if we have not the power as well as the form of godliness^g. On the contrary, as God disowned the people before referred to, so, however confident our claims to his favour may be, will He disown us in the day of judgment^h. Let us seek then to be Christians, “not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Let us not only unite ourselves to the church of God, but also devote ourselves to God in body, soul and spirit.]

2. Not to indulge any evil desires

[This is particularly specified by the apostle as a principal end for which these events were recordedⁱ. Had the Israelites watched against the first risings of sensuality and lewdness, they had not fallen into those numerous sins which brought upon them God’s heavy displeasure. And, if we would be preserved from spiritual idolatry, or even from the grossest acts of uncleanness, we must avoid all needless connexion with an idolatrous world, and labour to suppress the first motions of sin which work in our members. “God requires truth in our inward parts;” nor shall any but the pure in heart ever behold his face in peace^k. An “hypocrite in heart only treasures up wrath against the day of wrath.”]

3. Not so to presume on any past mercies, as to forget that we have need of continual watchfulness and circumspection

[The Israelites thought, that, after so many signal manifestations of God’s favour towards them, they could never be cast off. But, like Lot’s wife, they stand as a pillar of salt to us^l. Let not us then forget, that we may have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, and yet be entangled again with it and overcome^m,” and that “we may have been enlightened by the word of God, and have tasted of the powers of the world to come, and yet so apostatize, as never to be renewed unto repentanceⁿ.” The apostle himself felt the necessity of “keeping his body under, lest, after having preached to

to

^f John viii. 39, 41, 44.

^g Jer. vii. 4.

ⁱ Ver. 6.

^h Deut. ix. 12. Matt. vii. 21—23.

^k Matt. v. 8.

^l Luke xvii. 32.

^m 2 Pet. ii. 20.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 4—6.

to others, he himself should be a cast-away^o:" much more therefore should we, however confident we may be of our own steadfastness, "take heed lest we fall^p." Let us then not be satisfied with having come out of Egypt, or having put ourselves under the divine guidance, or having lived hitherto on Christ, the living bread and living water; but let us go on in dependence on his grace, and in obedience to his will. Let us combine a consciousness of our proneness to fall, with an humble affiance in him, "who alone is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^q."]

^o 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^p Ver. 12.

^q Jude 24.

CXX. THE BIRTH-RIGHT TYPICAL OF THE CHRISTIAN'S PORTION.

Gen. xxv. 32. *And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birth-right do to me?*

IT may be considered as a general rule, that no man abstains from any thing which he has purposed to do, for want of some excuse of expedience or necessity to justify it. A melancholy instance of infatuation we have in the history before us; an instance singular indeed as to the immediate act, but common, and almost universal as to the spirit manifested in it. Esau, having come home from hunting unusually oppressed with fatigue and hunger, set his heart upon his brother's pottage; and not only agreed to sell his birth-right for it, but confirmed with an oath the alienation of that inheritance, to which, by primogeniture, he was entitled. To justify his conduct he offered this vain and false apology, Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birth-right do to me? But the fact is, as the historian informs us, he "despised his birth-right."

Let us then consider

I. Esau's contempt of his birth-right

There were many important privileges attached to primogeniture among the Jews

[The first-born was by God's appointment to have dominion over his brethren^a, and to enjoy a double portion of his

^a Gen. xxvii. 29, 37. also xlix. 3.

his Father's inheritance^b. But besides these *civil*, there were also some *sacred* privileges, which he possessed. The Messiah, of whom he was to be a type, and who, in reference to the ordinances of birth-right, is called "the first-born among many brethren^c," was to spring from his loins^d. Yea, in some sense, the first-born had a better prospect even of heaven itself, than the rest of his brethren; because the expectation of the Messiah, who was to descend from him, would naturally cause him to look forward to that great event, and to enquire into the office and character, which the promised seed should sustain.]

But these privileges Esau despised

[He accounted them of no more value than a mess of pottage: nor did he speedily repent of his folly and wickedness. If he had seen the evil of his conduct, he would surely have endeavoured to get the agreement cancelled; and if his brother Jacob had refused to reverse it, he should have entreated the mediation of his father, that so he might be reinstated in his natural rights. But we read not of any such endeavours: on the contrary, we are told, "He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way;" so little did he value, or rather, so utterly did he "despise, his birth-right." On this account is he stigmatized by the apostle, as a profane person^e: had he disregarded only temporal benefits, he had been guilty of *folly*; but his contempt of spiritual blessings argued *profaneness*.]

Jacob's conduct indeed in this matter was exceeding base: but Esau's was inexpressibly vile. Yet will he be found to have many followers, if we examine

II. The analogy between his conduct and our own

The birth-right was typical of the Christian's portion

[The true Christian has not indeed any temporal advantages similar to those enjoyed by right of primogeniture: but he is made an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. He has a distinguished interest in the Saviour, and an indisputable title to the inheritance of heaven. And hence they who have attained the full possession of their inheritance are called, "The general assembly and church of the first-born^f."]

But the generality are like Esau, having

1. The same indifference about spiritual blessings

[Some

^b This was not optional with the parent in any case. Deut. xxi. 15, 17.

^c Rom. viii. 29.

^d In one instance this privilege was separated from the foregoing one; and both were alienated from the first-born; the former being given to Joseph, and the latter to Judah, as a punishment of Reuben's iniquity in lying with his father's concubine. 1 Chron. v. 1, 2.

^e Heb. xii. 16.

^f Ib. ver. 23.

[Some excuse may be offered for Esau, because he knew not what a Saviour, or what an inheritance he despised. But we have had the Saviour fully revealed to us; and know what a glorious place the heavenly Canaan is. Yet too many of us think as lightly of Christ and of heaven, as if neither he nor it were worth our attention: yea, we are ready at any time to barter them away for the most trifling gratification: and what is this, but to imitate the profaneness of Esau?]

2. The same insatiable thirst after earthly and sensual indulgence

[Though Esau pretended that he was near to die, it was only an excuse for his profane conduct; for it cannot be conceived, but that, in the house of an opulent man like Isaac, there either was, or might easily be procured, something to satisfy the cravings of nature. But he was bent upon having his brother's pottage, whatever it might cost ^g. And is it not so with those who yield to uncleanness, intemperance, or any base passion? Do they not sacrifice their health, their reputation, yea, their very souls, for a momentary indulgence? Do they not say, in fact, "Give me the indulgence of my lust; I must and will have it, whatever be the consequence: if I cannot have it without the loss of my birth-right, be it so; let my hope in Christ be destroyed; let my prospects of heaven be for ever darkened; let my soul perish; welcome hell; welcome damnation; only give me the indulgence which my soul longs after." This sounds harsh in words; but is it not realized in the lives and actions of the generality? Yes; as the wild ass, when seeking her mate, defies all endeavours to catch and detain her, so these persist in spite of all the means that may be used to stop their course; no persuasions, no promises, no threatenings, no consequences, temporal or eternal, can divert them from their purpose ^h.]

3. The same want of remorse for having sold their birth-right for a thing of nought

[Never did Esau discover any remorse for what he had done: for though, when the birth-right was actually given to Jacob, he "cried with an exceeding bitter cry, Bless me, even me also, O my father ⁱ," yet he never humbled himself for his iniquity, never prayed to God for mercy, nor endured patiently the consequences of his profaneness: on the contrary, he comforted himself with the thought, that he would murder his brother, as soon as ever his father should be dead ^k.

And

^g His extreme eagerness may be seen in his words, "Give me that *red, red*." Being captivated with the colour, he determined to get it whatever it might be, and whatever it might cost: and from thence the name Edom, which signifies *red*, was given him. Ver. 30.

^h Jer. ii. 23, 24.

ⁱ Gen. xxvii. 34.

^k Ib. 41, 42.

And is it not thus also with the generality? They go on, none saying, What have I done? Instead of confessing and bewailing their guilt and folly, they extenuate to the utmost, or perhaps even presume to justify, their impieties. Instead of crying day and night to God for mercy, they never bow their knee before him, or do it only in a cold and formal manner. And, instead of submitting to the rebukes of Providence, and kissing the rod, they are rather like a wild bull in a net, determining to add sin to sin. Even Judas himself had greater penitence than they. Alas! alas! what a resemblance does almost every one around us bear to this worthless wretch, this monster of profaneness!]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are still despising their birth-right

[Reflect a moment on your *folly* and your *danger*. Place yourselves a moment on a death-bed, and say, "I am at the point to die; and what profit do my past *lusts and pleasures* now do me?" Will ye then justify yourselves as ye now do, or congratulate yourselves on having so often gratified your vicious inclinations? Suppose on the other hand that ye were dying, like Isaac, in the faith of Christ; would ye then say, what profit shall my *Birth-right* do to me? Would it then appear a trifling matter to have an interest in the Saviour, and a title to heaven? Consider further, how probable it is that you may one day, like Esau, seek earnestly the inheritance you have sold, and yet find no place of repentance in your father's bosom! We mean not to say that any *true penitent* will be rejected: but the apostle intimates, what daily experience proves true, that, as Esau could not obtain a revocation of his father's word, though he sought it carefully with tears, so we may cry with great bitterness and anguish on account of the loss we have sustained, and yet never so repent as to regain our forfeited inheritance¹. At all events, if we obtain not a title to heaven while we are here, we may come to the door and knock, like the foolish virgins, and be dismissed with scorn and contempt. Having "sown the wind, we shall reap the whirlwind." Let us then "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near."]

2. Those who value their birth-right above every thing else

[Amidst the multitudes who pour contempt on spiritual blessings, there are some who know their value and taste their sweetness. But how often will temptations arise, that divert our attention from these great concerns, and impel us, with almost irresistible energy, to the commission of sin! And how may we do in one moment, what we shall have occasion to bewail

¹ Heb. xii. 17.

bewail to all eternity ! Let us then watch and pray that we enter not into temptation : and, however firm we may imagine our title to heaven, let us beware lest our subtle adversary deprive us of it : Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into the heavenly rest, any of us should seem to come short of it^m.]

^m Heb. iv. 1.

CXXI. THE TREE OF LIFE.

Rev. xxii. 2. *In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month : and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

THE scripture represents divine truth to us in terms accommodated to our low and carnal apprehensions. We know nothing on earth so attractive to the eye as pompous palaces, fraught with exquisite workmanship of every kind, and especially of rare and precious stones, and enlivened with the gayest scenes which art and nature can produce. On this account, St. John adopts these images to convey to our minds an idea of all that is great and glorious in heaven ; having described which as a city unparalleled for beauty, he proceeds to tell us of a river, clear as crystal, that waters it ; and of a tree of most wonderful qualities that adorns it.

It is our intention to shew

I. What we are to understand by the tree of life

It should seem that the tree mentioned in the text alludes to the tree of life which was created by God in Paradise

[Some have thought that St. John alludes to the trees which are mentioned in Ezekiel's vision^a : and it must be confessed that there is a striking coincidence of expression in the two passages : but the river of which Ezekiel speaks, and the

trees

^a Ezek. xlvi. 12. Dr. Kennicott's Dissertation on this subject is extremely ingenious ; but one of his strongest objections to the author's view of it seems wholly obviated by the explanation of Gen. iii. 22—24. given below. The author does not judge it necessary to assign all his reasons for differing from such great authority, though he did not think it expedient wholly to omit them.

trees growing on either side of it, represent the Gospel, producing life and fruitfulness wherever it flows: whereas the tree, mentioned in the text, is expressly called "the tree of life;" and is spoken of as growing in the midst of Paradise. Now this is the exact description given us of the tree of life which was formed in Eden^b: to that therefore we rather suppose the reference to be made; and this idea is confirmed by various other passages, which we shall have occasion to notice.]

In this view Christ himself is intended under this figurative representation

[The tree of life in Paradise may be considered as typical of Christ. It was a pledge to Adam, that, if he continued *obedient* to the end of the time appointed for his probation, he should live for ever. And the reason of his being driven afterwards from that tree by Cherubims with fiery swords, was, that he might be compelled to seek those other means of acceptance which God had ordained, and which were shadowed forth by the tree of life^c. As God in later ages destroyed Jerusalem, that his people might not be able to offer their former sacrifices, and might thereby be shut up, as it were, to that great sacrifice which the others typified; so God dealt with our first parents in the instance alluded to. Christ is to *fallen* man, what the tree of life was to man *in innocence*; he is, under the *Covenant of Grace*, what that was under the *Covenant of Works*; that ensured life *to obedience*, and Christ secures it to *faith in his name*. He is God's pledge to *us*, that, if we believe on him, we shall be saved^d: yea, even to those that are *in heaven* he must be considered as the pledge of their everlasting stability, since it is of his fruit that they eat^e, and their life is altogether bound up in him^f.]

That all may be persuaded to pluck the fruits of this tree, we proceed to shew

II. Its transcendent excellence

It is not in beauty only that this tree excels, but in usefulness. It surpasses all others

1. In its fruits

[So *abundant* are its fruits, that all in heaven, and all on earth, may eat of them; yea, if there were as many worlds as there have been, or ever shall be, individuals in the world, there would be sufficient for them all. But its fruits are also *various*: other trees, however fruitful, bear but one kind of fruit; but this bears "twelve manner of fruits:" whatever is suited to our different appetites, is to be derived from him: pardon, peace, love,

^b Gen. ii. 9.

^c Gen. iii. 22—24.

^d John xi. 24, 25.

^e Rev. ii. 7.

^f Col. iii. 4. Eph. i. 10.

love, joy, holiness, and whatever else a devout soul longeth after, it is all to be found in him, and to be enjoyed through him. Besides, it has this surprising quality, that its fruitfulness is *continual*: “In every month” we may behold him laden with fruit, as well in the depths of winter, as in the midst of summer; in seasons of the deepest adversity, as well as under the sunshine of prosperity: there never is a moment wherein we shall meet with such a disappointment as Christ experienced^s: we may at all times go and “sit under his shadow, and find his fruit sweet unto our taste.”]

2. In its leaves

[The leaves of other fruit-trees are, for the most part, worthless: but those of this tree are medicinal, and of most astonishing virtue; they are designed on purpose “for the healing of the nations.” There is no wound, however deadly, but the application of a leaf from this tree will heal it instantly. As a sight of the brazen serpent cured the wounded Israelites; and a touch of our Lord’s garment the diseased woman^h, so will the efficacy of these leaves be made apparent, whensoever they are applied. Nor is it one single wound that they will cure, but the whole soul, however infected in every part: as the tree, cast into the waters of Marah, healed the fountain itself, and rendered all its streams salubriousⁱ, so will a single leaf of this tree restore the most diseased soul to purity and peace. To every believer God will surely make known himself by that name which he has assumed for our encouragement, “I am the Lord that healeth thee^k.”]

From hence we may LEARN

1. What use we should make of Christ now

[We cannot but feel, if we be not altogether “past feeling,” that we stand in need of a Saviour. And behold, what a glorious salvation God has raised up for us! Should we not then apply to this Saviour? Has the Sun of Righteousness arisen with healing in his beams^l, and shall we not go forth to his light? Is there balm in Gilead, is an almighty Physician there^m, and shall we not seek the healing of our wounds? Shall the tree of life be accessible to us at all times, yea, shall the flaming sword be driving us *to* it instead of *from* it, and we not go to apply its leaves and eat of its fruit? Let us, whether dying of the wounds of sin, or agonizing through the fiery darts of temptation, go to Christ without delay; for surely virtue shall come forth from him, and heal us allⁿ. If he submitted to suffer for us that he might “heal us by his stripes^o,” and reconcile us to God by his death, “much more, being

^s Matt. xxi. 19.

ⁱ Exod. xv. 25.

^m Jer. viii. 22.

^h Numb. xxi. 8, 9. and Matt. ix. 20—22.

^k Ib. 26.

ⁿ Luke vi. 19.

^l Mal. i. v. 2.

^o Isai. liii. 5.

being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life^p." We may consider him as God's pledge to us, that, where he is, there shall also his servants be; and that, because he liveth, we shall live also^q.]

2. What enjoyment we shall have of Christ hereafter

[The words immediately following the text further confirm the sense given to the text itself. Sin entered into Paradise, and a tremendous curse followed it: but into heaven no sin, and therefore "no curse shall ever come:" nothing shall invade the peace, nothing disturb the security, of those who inhabit that glorious city: while the Tree of life continues there, all, that eat of its fruits, are kept from a possibility of falling. O blessed state! All feasting upon the glories of Jesus; and eternity the duration of their bliss! May we all arrive at that Paradise of God, and unite with all the choir of heaven in singing "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever."]

^p Rom. v. 10.

^q John xiv. 19.

CXXII. THE NATURE AND EXCELLENCE OF TRUE RELIGION.

Rom. ii. 28, 29. *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

IF we were to estimate men's religion by the degree of confidence which they expressed, we should be ready to think that the glory of the latter day were already arrived, so universal are men's claims to Christian knowledge and experience. But it is often found, that, where there is the strongest confidence, there is the least ground for it. None could ever be more firmly persuaded of their acceptance with God than the carnal Jews; yet were they fatally mistaken: for though they enjoyed many privileges, and abounded in outward observances, they were destitute of that vital principle, without which their religion was a vain ceremony, an empty form.

In the preceding context the apostle is proving to the Jews that *they* stood in need of a Saviour no less than the idolatrous Gentiles: and, knowing what a stress they laid upon

upon their outward privileges, he tells them, that it was not an outward and carnal, but an inward and spiritual service that God required, and that was necessary to justify their pretensions to the divine favour.

His words naturally lead us to shew

I. The vanity of a mere outward and nominal religion

All are apt to rest in external forms

[There is nothing in mere forms, which does not gratify, rather than counteract, our natural tendency to self-righteousness, and self-applause. Hence arises that universal readiness to substitute something, that is of an external nature, in the place of vital godliness. The Jews valued themselves on their descent from Abraham, and on their admission into covenant with God by the right of circumcision: they also boasted of the law in which they were instructed, and of the ordinances wherein they drew nigh to God: and such was their dependence on these things, that they would not suffer themselves to doubt one moment their title to heaven. Precisely such also are the grounds, on which the generality of Christians hope to obtain eternal happiness: they have been born of Christian parents, devoted to God in baptism, instructed in the truths of the Gospel, and brought up in a constant attendance, if not on the Lord's Supper, at least on the other ordinances of religion. If they can boast thus far, they will conclude that all is well with them, and that their salvation is quite secure.]

But the form of godliness without its power is of no avail

[Testimonies to this effect are exceeding numerous and strong. John the Baptist particularly cautioned the Jews against trusting in their descent from Abraham^a: our Lord also warned his hearers, that though they were Abraham's children after the flesh, they could not be considered as the seed to whom the promises were made, because they did not the works of Abraham^b. St. Paul also, having enumerated the great and glorious privileges to which the Jews were entitled, yet declares that "all were not Israel who were of Israel," and that the spiritual seed alone should be partakers of the promises^c.

However therefore our knowledge of divine truth be enlarged, or our outward services be multiplied, we can never be admitted into God's sanctuary, unless we have a better righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees attained^d: we may indeed, "have a name to live; but we are really dead^e."] In

^a Matt. iii. 9.

^d Matt. v. 20.

^b John viii. 39.

^e Rev. iii. 1.

^c Rom. ix. 4—8.

In confirmation of this point we proceed to state

II. The nature and excellence of true religion

True religion extends its influence to the inmost dispositions of the soul

[Circumcision and Baptism are mere signs, and shadowy representations of something inward and spiritual; they are intended to lead our minds to "the circumcision of the heart," and "the washing of regeneration^f." True religion rests not "in the letter of the law," but goes to "the spirit" of it; and inclines the heart to an uniform, unreserved compliance with the will of God. God himself has informed us fully upon this point; "Neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creation^g." The renovation of our inward man after the divine image, is that, which alone constituted a person a Jew, in God's estimation; nor is any thing less than this necessary to constitute *us* Christians in the sight of God. Without this, the circumcision of the Jew was a mere concision; and the baptism of the Christian is a worthless ablution^h.]

Wherever this operates, God looks upon it with pleasure and delight

[Man's approbation is confined to the outward forms of religion; the life and power of which are reprobated by him as hypocrisy and enthusiasm. But God, who sees the emptiness of mere outward services through the specious veil that is put upon them, beholds also the intrinsic worth of those dispositions which are cultivated by the true Christian. The sighs and groans of a penitent are as a sweet-smelling savour unto God; while the self-exalting thoughts and expressions of a proud Pharisee are as an offensive "smoke in his nose," which excites nothing but disgust and abhorrenceⁱ. Nor is there a good desire rising in the bosom from a principle of pure religion, but it is instantly noted in the book of God's remembrance^k, and shall be recorded to the Christian's honour in the great day of our Lord's appearing^l.]

ADDRESS

I. Those who are resting in outward forms

[Persons who are diligent in external duties, never doubt but that they are true Christians: but if they be not equally attentive to their inward motives and principles, God himself tells

^f Comp. Deut. x. 16. and xxx. 6. with Col. ii. 11, 12. and Tit. iii. 5.

^g Gal. vi. 15. *κτίσις*.

^h Phil. iii. 2, 3. 1 Pet. iii. 21.

ⁱ Jer. xxxi. 18, 20. Isai. lxxv. 5. See also Luke xviii. 11—14.

^k Mal. iii. 16, 17.

^l 1 Pet. i. 7. 1 Cor. iv. 5.

tells us that they are no Christians. Let us then enquire, not whether we be descended from Christian ancestors, but whether we be born of God? Let us ask, not whether we have "cleansed the outside of the cup and platter;" but whether we are "purified from all spiritual as well as fleshly filthiness^m?" And let us remember, that "the king's daughters are all glorious *within*;" and that their brightest ornament is "the hidden man of the heartⁿ:" nor is it he who commendeth himself that is approved of God, "but he whom the Lord commendeth^o."]

2. Those who disregard religion entirely

[It has already been seen that persons may be Christians in appearance, and very observant of all the ordinances of religion, while yet they are no Christians in the sight of God: how far then must they be from deserving this appellation, who habitually violate the commandments of their divine Master, and live in a constant neglect of the most acknowledged duties! Surely "their circumcision is become uncircumcision;" instead of being Jews "they are of the synagogue of Satan:" and the unbaptized heathen, who walk agreeably to the light of nature, shall condemn them, who, having been baptized into the faith of Christ, are yet despising his authority and trampling on his laws^p. Let then the very name of Christian be renounced at once, or let the spirit of Christianity be made apparent in our lives.]

3. Those who are cultivating a spiritual and heavenly mind

[Amidst the abounding of iniquity there yet are many who are devoted to God both in heart and life: and unspeakably blessed is their state. "Their praise indeed is not of men:" by men they are derided as enthusiasts and fanatics: but they have "praise of God." God beholds them with pleasure, and forbears to destroy the world for their sake^q. He accounts them his servants, his children, his glory^r; and in a little time he will welcome them to his bright abodes, saying "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord." At the day of judgment too will the Lord Jesus Christ confess them before his Father and his holy angels; "These were Christians indeed; they followed me in the regeneration, and shall therefore now be seated on thrones of glory: as I have already shewn my mercy to them, so will I now evince my righteousness in them; they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy^s." Go on then, beloved,

from

^m 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^o 2 Cor. x. 18.

^q Isai. i. 9. Matt. xxiv. 22.

^s Rev. iii. 4, 5.

ⁿ Ps. xlv. 13. 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^p Ver. 25—27 with Rev. ii. 9.

^r Isai. xlv. 13.

from grace to grace : never think that you have yet attained, or that you are already perfect ; but forget all that is behind, and press forward for that which is before, knowing assuredly, that “ to him who worketh righteousness shall be a sure reward.”]

CXXIII. CHRIST OUR PASSOVER.

1 Cor. v. 7, 8. *Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness ; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

CHRISTIANITY affords us not only new grounds of hope, but also new motives to action, yea, the only motives that are capable of giving an uniform direction to our conduct. The arguments derived from the excellency of virtue, the fitness of things, or even the certainty of rewards and punishments, never could produce any effects comparable to those, which have been wrought by the exhibition of a crucified Saviour. St. Paul, well knowing the efficacy of this topic, proposed it on all occasions. If he would enforce the duties of love, beneficence, or zeal, the love of Christ was both his pattern, and his plea. Thus, in the passage before us, having enjoined the Corinthian church to excommunicate their incestuous member, he reminds them of the sacrifice of Christ ; and, in allusion to their accustomed method of eating the Paschal Lamb, exhorts them to celebrate the Christian passover with becoming purity, both as to outward discipline, and inward affection. In considering his words we shall notice

I. The representation here given of Christ

Christ is here said to have been “ sacrificed for us”

[Sacrifices were appointed of God from the very fall of Adam as means of conciliating his favour, and expiating any offences which had been committed against him. The creatures sacrificed were put to death, and were always considered as dying in the place of the offender, who, by his transgression, had forfeited his life to divine Justice. Precisely in this way has Christ been sacrificed *for us* : “ he died, the just for the unjust ;” he was put to death not merely for our good, but in our stead : and in his sufferings we may behold a figurative representation of what we had merited by our transgressions.]

In this view he is called "our Passover"

[The Paschal Lamb was sacrificed in a peculiar manner, and on a most extraordinary occasion. God had determined to destroy the Egyptian first-born, but to spare his own people: He appointed the Jews to kill a lamb, to sprinkle its blood upon the door-posts, and to eat its flesh roasted with fire, taking also with it some bitter herbs^a. Upon their due observation of this ordinance God promised to interpose for their deliverance, and not to suffer the destroyer to involve so much as one of them in the common ruin. Thus are we obnoxious to the wrath that is coming upon the ungodly world: but Jesus, that spotless Lamb, has, on the very same month, day, and hour, that the passover was first killed, and in the midst of most inconceivable agonies both of body and soul, yet without the breaking of a bone, been slain for us^b; and we are by faith to sprinkle our hearts with his precious blood: we are also to feed upon his body and blood; and, in so doing, are as sure of the divine protection as if we were already in heaven. Though "thousands should fall beside us, and ten thousand at our right hand, the sword of the avenger should not come nigh us."^c]

That we may rightly improve this glorious truth, let us consider

II. The exhortation grounded upon it.

While the occasion of Christ's death affords us ground for the deepest humiliation, the deliverance effected by it should ever be remembered with joy

[The Jews were commanded to "keep" an annual "feast" in commemoration of their deliverance from the destroying angel. Such a feast is the Lord's Supper to us: as they fed on the Paschal Lamb, so do we on the body and blood of Christ, represented to us in the bread and wine: and as their feast was a memorial of the mercies they had received, so is ours to be, to the latest generations. Indeed our whole lives should be kept as an holy solemnity, because we are daily and hourly experiencing the saving virtue of the Redeemer's blood.]

The peculiar manner in which the Jews were to observe their Passover, was a figurative representation of the manner in which ours also should be observed

[The Jews were enjoined on pain of death to forbear the use of leaven, and to put it out of their houses for seven days^c: and they were to eat the lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Thus is the leaven of sin to be purged out of our hearts

^a Exod. xii. 3—9.

^b Ib. ver. 46. with John xix. 33. 36.

^c Exod. xii. 15. 19.

hearts with the greatest care; and while we feed by faith on the spotless lamb of God, we must partake also of the bitter herbs of repentance and "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." As for the "old leaven" of Gentile uncleanness, or of Jewish pride and malignity, it must be wholly put away: the scrupulosity, with which the Jews searched and swept their houses to purge out all leaven, is an admirable pattern for our imitation. 'A sincere desire to know the will of God, a full and unreserved determination to do it, together with a correspondent meekness in our spirits, purity in our thoughts, sincerity in our words, and integrity in our actions, this, this is the Christian temper; this is the frame in which we should approach the table of the Lord, and in which our whole lives should be kept as a feast unto the Lord. Moreover as the Jews were to eat their passover in haste, with their shoes on their feet, and their loins girt, so must we be in a continual readiness to go towards the promised land.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who neglect Christ, and the memorials of his dying love

[How commonly, alas! is the table of the Lord neglected! And still more how unconcerned are men about the sprinkling of their souls with the blood of Christ! but there is no other preservative against the sword of the destroying angel. Were the Jews delivered by their own superior goodness, wisdom, strength? No: it was the blood sprinkled on their door-posts which alone diverted the stroke of vengeance; and as the most righteous man amongst them would have been slain, if he had despised that ordinance, so was the vilest amongst them preserved by a due observation of it: blessed, and instructive truth! may God impress it deeply on all our minds!]

2. Those who are coming to the table of the Lord

[It is not a customary and formal attendance at the Lord's Supper, and much less a profane receiving of it as a political test, that will prove beneficial to the soul: such impiety is more calculated to incense the wrath of God against us: we have seen *how* we ought to keep the feast: let me ask them, Have you carefully purged out the old leaven, and are you sincerely determined to give yourselves up to God? If so, come and feed with gratitude upon the Paschal Lamb; but take with it the bitter herbs: presume not to touch it but in God's appointed way: and let your spirit and conduct shew that you have not eaten it unworthily.]

CXXIV. CANAAN TYPICAL OF THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL REST.

Heb. iv. 1. *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.*

THE histories of the Old Testament are very instructive to us—

The divine interpositions, as well in a way of judgment as of mercy, shew *us* what to expect from God^a—

The apostle has been recording the destruction of the Jews in the wilderness^b—

And from thence he takes occasion to urge us to holy fear and diligence—

Consider

I. What is that rest which God has promised us

The rest promised to the Israelites was the land of Canaan—

But the Israelites had already for many hundred years possessed that land—

The rest therefore, which David speaks of as yet future, must be a rest, of which Canaan was only a type or shadow—

It includes

1. A *present* rest in Christ

[A soul ignorant of Christ, can have no rest—

But “by believing in Christ it has peace with God”—

This is that rest which our Saviour promises to troubled souls^c—]

2. A *future* rest in heaven

[The rest of the soul is never perfect in this life—

Tribulations are the way through which we are all to pass—

But in heaven our happiness will be complete—

That therefore must be the rest in which our labours shall terminate^d—]

Of this rest God has left us a promise in his word

[It is called *his*, because he has prepared it for us from the beginning—

It is his also, inasmuch as it is the gift of his sovereign grace—

It

^a 1 Cor. x. 11.

^c Matt. xi. 28.

^b Chap. iii.

^d Rev. xiv. 13.

It is his moreover, as enjoyed in and with him—

Nor has he only revealed it as an object worthy our pursuit, but promised it to every penitent and believing sinner^e—]

It becomes us then to enquire

II. What effect the promise of this rest should have upon us

The news of any great and unexpected acquisition immediately produces strong emotions in our minds

The prospect therefore of present and eternal rest should surely excite much solicitude respecting it

[We should endeavour to ascertain our title to it—

We should fear lest by any means we be deprived of it—

Nor should we account any thing too much to do in order to obtain it—

Our vigilance and zeal should be proportioned to its value—]

The danger of coming short of it should increase our diligence in the pursuit of it

[Of six hundred thousand that came out of Egypt, only two entered into Canaan—

The others “could not enter in by reason of their unbelief”—

And how much unbelief is there in *our* hearts!—

Yet, if we live under its power, we in vain hope for this rest—

Nor will the numbers of those, who are so circumstanced, afford security to us, any more than it did to those who perished in the wilderness.

Surely then we should “fear lest we perish after their example”—]

The misery of coming short of it should also stimulate our exertions

[There is no intermediate state between heaven and hell—

Nor will there be any other state of probation afforded us—

They who rest not in Christ, can never know solid peace in this world—

Nor will they experience any thing but tribulation to all eternity^f—

There will be an impassable gulf between them and heaven—

What fear and caution should this thought excite—]

We should fear lest we even “seem” to come short of it

[To be in suspense about our eternal state is dreadful—

God’s honour, as well as our happiness, is affected by it—

We

^e Acts ii. 39.

^f 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

We should seek to be “always triumphing in Christ”—
And at last to have “an abundant entrance into his kingdom”—]

ADDRESS

1. To those who have no fears about their souls

[Your rest, such as it is, is by no means to be desired—
It will soon vanish in the prospect of death and judgment—

And it will speedily terminate in everlasting woe—

Seek then the true rest, while yet it may be found—

Seek it in Christ who alone can impart it to you—

Nor doubt but that it will abundantly recompense your labours—]

2. To those who are filled with slavish fears

[These are not fears which you ought to entertain—

They are calculated to rob you of the heavenly rest, rather than to bring you into it—

The fear you should cultivate, is a jealous and watchful fear—

To live under the influence of this, is to be truly blessed—

This well consists with even a present rest in the Lord Jesus—

Lay hold then on the promise which is left you in the gospel—

And expect that “He who has promised will also perform”—

They “who trust in the Lord, shall never be confounded”—]

3. To those who maintain a godly fear and jealousy

[Disputes about the doctrine of perseverance are unprofitable and vain—

But to unite a jealousy over ourselves with a confidence in God, will guard us against mistakes on either hand—

Go on then in this good way, in which there is no danger of error or excess—

Thus will your soul be kept at an equal distance from presumption and despondency—

And the attainment of your rest be perfectly secured—]

CXXV. SECURITY OF THOSE WHO FLEE TO THE CITY
OF REFUGE.

Heb. vi. 17, 18. *God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*

THE multiplying of oaths is a dreadful snare to the consciences of men; and a light method of administering and of taking them is amongst the most heinous of our national sins. But they run to a contrary extreme who affirm all oaths to be sinful: on many occasions they were prescribed to the Jews by God himself: the most eminent saints also, under the Christian dispensation, as well as under that of the Jews, have, on many occasions, appealed in the most solemn manner unto God. In the passage before us God sanctions the use of oaths in concerns which are of great moment, and which cannot be settled in any other way. We are even assured that God himself has condescended to adopt this very method of confirming and establishing the minds of his people. From the Apostle's account of this astonishing transaction, we shall be led to consider

I. The description here given us of God's people

They are described

1. By their state

[They once "were, like others, children of wrath^a:" but they have been regenerated by God's spirit, and adopted into his family. "Being thus his sons they are also heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^b." The promises, temporal, spiritual, eternal, are their inheritance. Hence they are justly called, "the heirs of promise." To this happy state they have been brought in consequence of God's eternal counsels^c. But they have nevertheless attained to it in the use of means^d.]

2. By their conduct

[Eternal life has been set before them in the gospel; and Christ has been declared to be the only way in which that life can be found^e. This record they have believed: and, feeling their utter need of mercy, they have sought it in Christ^f. They have

^a Eph. ii. 3.

^b Rom. viii. 17.

^c 2 Tim. i. 9.

^d Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^e 1 John v. 11, 12.

^f Gal. ii. 16.

have regarded him as *the city of refuge*, in which the manslayer found protection from the avenger of blood; and have fled to him with holy earnestness as their only hope². In this way they have “laid hold” of God’s promised mercy; and have attained to that state in which they may assuredly expect it.]

That these are the most highly favoured of all people will appear, if we consider

II. The regard which God manifests towards them

He wills that they should enjoy “strong consolation”

[He would not that they should be held in doubtful suspense, or be harassed by fluctuations of hope and fear. He wishes rather that they should enjoy the privileges of their high station. Though they have in themselves much cause to fear, yet in HIM they have reason to exult and triumph. They should “know in whom they have believed, and that he is both able and willing to keep what they have committed to him^b.”]

In order to this he would have them persuaded of “the immutability of his counsel”

[Nothing more contributes to the comfort of God’s people than a view of every thing as subjected to his unchanging will and irresistible control. If only they learn to refer every thing to his overruling agency or righteous permission, all cause for disquietude will cease. Do the dispensations of his providence appear dark? the soul will be satisfied when it can say, This hath God doneⁱ. If events seem to contradict the promises, the reflection that God’s ways are unsearchable will silence every murmur, and dispose us to trust God, till he shall be pleased to unfold his purposes to our view^k. “Who shall separate me from the love of God?” is the triumphant challenge that will be given to all our enemies, as soon as ever we see God appointing every thing with immutable and unerring wisdom^l.]

For this purpose God confirms his promise with an oath

[His promise could not be made more sure. But we are prone to unbelief. On this account he condescends to consult our weakness, and to swear by himself, that we may be the more firmly persuaded of his veracity. Even though God had not sworn, he never could have receded from his engagements, seeing “it is impossible for God to lie.” But his oath is calculated to satisfy the most fearful mind; and must convince us,
beyond

² Numb. xxxv. 11, 12.

^k Heb. xi. 17—19.

^b 2 Tim. i. 12.

^l Rom. viii. 33.

ⁱ 1 Sam. iii. 18.

beyond a possibility of doubt, that he will never leave us nor forsake us ^m.]

INFER

1. How astonishing is the condescension of God !

[That God should voluntarily lay himself under any obligations at all to us, may well excite our astonishment. But that he should so far indulge those, who doubt his veracity, as to confirm his promises with an oath, with a view to their more abundant consolation and encouragement, is a condescension of which we could have formed no idea. In this He has cast a reflection, as it were, upon his own character, in order that he might silence their unreasonable doubts. But he is God and not man, and therefore He could submit to such a degradation. O let all of us admire and adore him ! And let us be careful that we “receive not this grace of God in vain ⁿ.”]

2. How great is the sin of unbelief !

[Unbelief says, in fact, not only that “it is possible for God to lie,” but that He indeed is “a liar ^o.” How would such an indignity be borne by US, especially if we had never given the smallest occasion for it, but had fulfilled every promise that we had ever made ? No doubt then God must be displeased whenever we cast such a reflection upon him. And if *now*, after that he has confirmed his promise with an oath, we disbelieve him, the affront will be aggravated in a tenfold degree, and our guilt be proportionably increased. Let us know then, that “not one jot or tittle of his word can fail ;” and rest assured, that, if we trust in him, we shall never be confounded ^p.]

3. How wide is the difference between God’s people and the world at large !

[There may be but little *visible* difference between them : but they do differ very widely ; nor is the difference the less real because it is invisible. The godly have fled for refuge to Christ as their only hope : they make the promises of God in Christ their boast, and their inheritance : and, while God regards them as his heirs, he fills them with a peace that passeth all understanding. But what hope have the careless and ungodly world ? What consolation have they from the immutability of God ? All their comfort is founded on the hope that God may lie. Hence, instead of children and heirs of God, they are children of the wicked one, and inheritors of his portion. Let these awful truths sink deep into our minds. And “let us not be of them who turn back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of their souls ^q.”]

^m Heb. xiii. 5.

^p Isai. xlv. 17.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 1.

^q Heb. x. 39.

^o 1 John v. 10.

CXXVI. THE JUBILEE A TYPE OF THE GOSPEL.

Lev. xxv. 9, 10, 11. *Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound, on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you.*

IN order that our Lord's descent from Judah and from David should be clear and acknowledged, it was necessary that the various tribes and families should be kept distinct. With this view many ordinances were appointed for the continuing of every man's inheritance in his own family*. This seems to have been the primary intent of that ordinance which is mentioned in the text. A variety of circumstances in a length of time might produce alienations of property; and if this had been suffered to continue, a confusion of the families and tribes would have speedily ensued. To prevent this therefore, God commanded that on every fiftieth year every inheritance should revert to its original possessor. This season was called the Jubilee; which, while it answered many other important purposes, served in a very eminent manner to typify the gospel.

We may observe a very strict agreement between the jubilee and the gospel.

I. In the time and manner of their proclamation

The jubilee was proclaimed with the sound of trumpets [The tendency of great reverses of fortune is, in many instances at least, to produce a torpor of mind, and a stupid indifference to the things we once highly valued. Hence it was but too probable, that they, who had alienated their inheritance and reduced themselves to the lowest ebb of misery, might sink into such a state of ignorance or indolence, as to let the period appointed for their restoration pass unnoticed. To prevent this, God commanded the trumpets to be sounded throughout all the land; that so the attention of all being awakened, and their spirits exhilarated, every individual might be stirred up to claim the privileges to which he was entitled.]

The

* A difficulty on this subject having occurred, God himself decided it, and grounded a new law on that decision. See Numb. xxxvi. ver. 6, 7.

The precise time on which this sacred year commenced, was "the day of atonement"

[The day of atonement was the most solemn season in the whole year: the people were required to afflict their souls for sin; and peculiar sacrifices were to be offered for the iniquities of the whole nation. It should seem at first sight that this was an unfit season for the proclamation of such joyful tidings; but it was indeed the fittest season in the whole year: for, when could masters and creditors be so properly called upon to exercise mercy, as when they themselves had been obtaining mercy at the hands of a reconciled God? Or when could debtors and slaves so reasonably be expected to receive their liberties with gratitude, and improve them with care, as when they had been bewailing the sins, by which, in all probability, they had been deprived of them?]

The gospel also is to be publicly proclaimed in every place

[One would have imagined that it were quite sufficient for God once to make known the way in which he would pardon sinners, and that from that time every sinner would of his own accord exert himself to obtain the proffered mercy. But experience proves that our bereavement of heaven is not felt as any evil; our bondage to sin is not at all lamented; and, if no means were used to awaken men's attention to their misery, and to stir them up to embrace the blessings of salvation, the greater part of mankind would rest satisfied with their state, till the opportunity for improving it was irrevocably lost. God therefore sends forth his servants to "preach the gospel to every creature," and commands them to "lift up their voice as a trumpet."]

This too has its origin in the great atonement

[If, as some contend, the year of our Lord's death was the year of Jubilee, the coincidence was indeed very singular and important. But, however this might be, certain it is, that, "without shedding of blood, there could be no remission;" nor, till our Lord had expiated the sins of the whole world, could the gospel be universally proclaimed. But no sooner was his sacrifice offered, than God was reconciled to his guilty creatures; and from that time must the commission given to his apostles be dated. A very few days had elapsed, when they sounded the gospel trumpet in the ears of that very people who had crucified the Lord of glory; and had the happiness to find thousands at a time "brought from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Thus clearly was the connexion marked between the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and the deliverance of sinners that was purchased by it.]

But

But the agreement between the two is yet more manifest

II. In the blessings conveyed by them

The privileges imparted by the Jubilee were many and of great value

[There was, in the first place, an universal *exemption from every kind of agricultural labour*. None were either to reap the produce of the last year, or to sow their land with a view to a future crop; but all were to gather from day to day what had grown spontaneously; and every person had an equal right to all the fruits of the earth^b. A better mode of improving their time was provided for them: *public instruction* was to be given to all, men, women, and children; in order that none, however their education had been neglected, might remain ignorant of God, and his law^c. Now also *debts*, in whatever way they had been contracted, and to whatever amount, were to be freely *remitted*^d. But, besides these privileges which were common to other sabbatical years, there were others peculiar to the year of jubilee. If any persons had, by their own voluntary act, or by the inexorable severity of some creditor, been sold, they were to *receive their liberty*, and to be restored to their families, as soon as ever the appointed trumpets should sound^e. Yea, if they had formerly possessed an *inheritance* in the land, they were to be instantly reinstated in the possession of it^f: so that in a moment they *reverted* to their former condition, with all the advantage of their dear-bought experience.]

Analogous to these are the blessings imparted by the gospel

[Varying their order, we shall first mention *the forgiveness of sins*. Though the debt we owe to God exceeds all possible calculation, it is all freely, and for ever remitted, as soon as ever the gospel trumpet is heard, and its glad tidings are welcomed to the soul^g. *Our bondage to sin and Satan is reversed*; so that nothing shall ever lead us captive, provided we assert our liberty, and claim our privilege^h: being made free by Christ, we shall be free indeedⁱ. And, notwithstanding we have sold our heavenly inheritance, and alienated it for a thing of nought, yet are we called to take possession of it: we are *restored* to our father's house; we are brought again into the family of saints and angels; and, with our title to heaven, have the enjoyment of it renewed^k. Now too are we commanded to *rest from all the works of the law, and from all the works*

^b Ver. 4—7, 11.

^c Ver. 39—41.

^h Rom. vi. 14.

^e Deut. xxxi. 10—13.

^f Ver. 10, 28.

ⁱ John viii. 36.

^d Deut. xv. 1, 2.

^g Acts x. 43.

^k Eph. ii. 19.

works of the flesh ; and, every one of us, to subsist from day to day upon the bounties of divine grace¹. As we sowed them not, so neither are we to reap them as our own, but to receive them on the same footing as the poorest and meanest of the human race ; all of us being alike pensioners on the divine bounty. Nor are we to lay up in store of what God gives us ; but every day to gather our daily bread. To all these blessings is added that of *divine instruction* : as we are taught how to improve our leisure, so are eyes given us to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand^m : and henceforth it is to be our daily labour to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Such are the blessings bestowed by the gospel ; nor can any unworthiness in us deprive us of them, provided we thankfully accept them as the purchase of Christ’s blood, and the gifts of his grace*.]

INFER

1. In what way it is that sinners are to be converted to God

[The priest might have expostulated with the Jewish debtors or bond-slaves on the folly of their past conduct ; but it was the sound of the trumpet alone that could bring them liberty. So we may represent to sinners the evil of their past ways, and denounce against them the judgments threatened in the word of God ; but it is the sweet voice of the gospel alone that will enable them to throw off their yoke, and lead them to the enjoyment of eternal glory. This is told us by the prophet ; who, speaking of the conversion of the world in the latter day, says, “In that day the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come who were ready to perish, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalemⁿ.” O that this were duly considered by all who go forth as the Lord’s ambassadors ! It is not to preach a scanty morality that we are called ; but to publish the glad tidings of a full and free salvation ; a salvation founded in the blood of Christ, and suited to those who are weeping for their sins. Behold then, “this is the accepted time ; this is the day of salvation :” now the trumpet sounds in our ears ; let us all arise, and bless our deliverer ; and improve the privileges so richly bestowed upon us. Then, when the last trumpet shall sound, and the time, which God has fixed for the redemption of *his* purchased possession,

¹ Heb. iv. 10. Gal ii. 20.

^m 1 John ii. 20.

* For most congregations it would be more edifying to pass over briefly what was common to the sabbatical years, and to insist only on the blessings *peculiar to the year of Jubilee*, namely, deliverance from bondage, and restoration to one’s inheritance.

ⁿ Isai. xxvii. 13.

possession, "shall be fully come," we shall be claimed by him as his property, his portion, his inheritance for ever.]

2. How solicitous is God to counteract the folly and wickedness of man !

[A subordinate end of the Jubilee was, to counteract the cupidity of some, and the prodigality of others. But it is a very principal end of the gospel to remedy the miseries, which men have entailed upon themselves. Well might God have said to the whole human race, "Ye have sown the wind, and ye shall reap the whirlwind:" but instead of that, He says, "Ye have sold yourselves for nought, and ye shall be redeemed without money^a:" "I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Let not then these gracious declarations reach our ears in vain; Behold, "the year of the Lord's redeemed is come^o;" "the perfect law of liberty" is now proclaimed: the Lord himself now preaches "deliverance to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound^p:" he says to the prisoners, "Go forth and shew yourselves." The Lord grant that none may put from them these words of life; or receive this grace of God in vain !]

3. How blessed are they who embrace the glad tidings of the gospel !

[We can easily conceive the blessedness of one, who is in an instant restored from poverty and cruel bondage to the possession of liberty and affluence. But who can estimate aright the happiness of those who are freed from the curses of the law, the fears of death, the bondage of sin, and the damnation of hell? Who can fully appreciate the joy of a trembling and condemned sinner^q, who by the sound of the gospel is enabled to call God his father, and heaven his rightful inheritance? Well does the Psalmist, in reference to this very ordinance of the Jubilee, exclaim, "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound^q." Surely there is no state on earth to be compared with this. May we seek it as our supreme felicity; and may we all enjoy it as an antepast of heaven !]

^a Isai. lii. 3.

^o Isai. lxiii. 4.

^p Luke iv. 18, 19.

^q Ps. lxxxix. 15.

CXXVII. ZION A TYPE OF THE CHURCH.

Ps. cxxxii. 13—16. *The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.*

THE efficacy of fervent prayer is strongly marked in the holy scriptures: there is scarcely a saint, respecting whom any information is given us, who may not be adduced as an example of God's readiness to answer prayer. Solomon, if, as some suppose, he was the author of this Psalm, records the answer which God vouchsafed to the supplications he had offered at the dedication of his temple: and it is worthy of observation, that the very language of his petition was made the vehicle of God's promise^a.

In considering these words we shall notice

I. God's love to his church

Mount Zion must be numbered among the most distinguished types, not only because its very name is given to the church of Christ, but because God's love to his church was represented to the world by the favours conferred on that chosen hill. As formerly on mount Zion, so now in the Christian church, God

1. Dispenses his ordinances

[The Jews were not suffered to present their offerings in any other place: there alone were the sacrifices to be slain; and there alone were the means of reconciliation with God to be exhibited before their eyes. Thus in the church of Christ, and in that only, have we the way of life and salvation fully opened. Among the heathen world we behold no traces of that path marked out for us in the gospel: but wherever God has called a people to the knowledge of his Son, and appointed over them a faithful shepherd, there his word is preached with power; there the atoning blood of Jesus flows: the administration of the sacraments is not there an empty ceremony, but a lively and impressive exhibition of the doctrines of grace.]

2. Vouchsafes

^a Compare ver. 8—10. and 2 Chron. vi. 41, 42. with the text and the verse following it.

2. Vouchsafes his presence

[When the ark, which had long abode in a moveable tabernacle at Shiloh, was brought to Zion, its residence was fixed; and the Deity, whom it represented, called that place his "rest." From that time his visible glory was revealed there: he dwelt between the cherubims; and was accessible to all through the blood of the sacrifices, and the mediation of the High Priest. In the church also is his glory seen, even "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Whatever may be known of him in the works of creation and providence is darkness itself, in comparison of that light which shines in his gospel. To those, who seek his face, "he manifests himself, as he does not unto the world;" and often constrains them to cry out with astonishment, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!"]

3. Communicates his blessings

[When the high priest had finished his work within the veil, he came forth to bless the people: and his word was confirmed by God to all penitent and believing worshippers. So now in his church does God bless his people with all spiritual blessings. He imparts pardon to the guilty, strength to the weak, consolation to the troubled: whatever any stand in need of, they are sure to obtain it, if they come to him in his appointed way^b. This thousands can attest; this thousands yet unborn shall, in every succeeding age, experience.]

But his love to the church will yet further appear by considering

II. The promises made to her

These, as has been observed, precisely accord with the petitions offered. In them God assures his church that he will bestow abundant blessings

1. On the ordinances

[There may be in the text some reference to the assembling of all the males three times a year at Jerusalem, when it was probable that the conflux of such multitudes to one place might produce a scarcity of provisions, and thereby distress the poor. This effect God promises to counteract by giving them abundant crops. But certainly we must understand this as relating also to spiritual food: and how delightfully is it verified under the ministration of the gospel! The word, dispensed in one short hour, has, like the bread multiplied by our Lord, been food for thousands; and though simple, and unadorned, has, like the pulse given to Daniel and his companions,

^b Ps. xlviii. 2, 3.

companions, been more nutritious than all the dainties sent from the monarch's table^c.]

2. On those who administer the ordinances

[The priests, who served in the temple, were clad with linen, to denote the purity that was expected of them. But they, who minister under the gospel, provided they walk worthy of their high and holy office, shall be "clothed with salvation" itself: "in watering others, they themselves shall be watered;" and "in saving others, they themselves shall be saved." Nor is this a blessing to themselves alone; for, in proportion as ignorant and ungodly ministers are a curse to those over whom they are placed, the superintendence of pious, intelligent, and faithful ministers must be esteemed a blessing.]

3. On those who attend the ordinances

[The request made by Solomon was, that "the saints might shout for joy:" and God tells him that they shall shout *aloud* for joy: thus does God on numberless occasions give us more than we either asked or thought. A faithful dispensation of the ordinances is a source of joy to many souls. The saints especially, who receive the truth in the love of it, are often enabled by it to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified." And this is a blessing, not to themselves only, but to the whole church. By this they adorn, and recommend the gospel; and are stimulated to diffuse the savour of it all around them.]

INFER

1. How little reason have mere formal worshippers to think that they belong to the church of God!

[The enjoyment of these promises is inconsistent with habitual formality: either therefore God falsifies his word (which it were the vilest blasphemy to imagine) or the formalist is yet an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel."]

2. How impotent are all attempts to destroy the church^d!

3. How strong is the Christian's obligation to serve and honour God!

[Does God so delight in his church as to make it his rest, and to load it with so many benefits? Surely every member of it should testify his gratitude by a cheerful and unreserved obedience.]

^c Dan. i. 12, 13.

^d Ps. cxxv. 1. and xlviii. 12, 13. and xlv. 5. and Matt. xvi. 18.

CXXVIII. THE TEMPLE A TYPE OF CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE.

¹ Pet. ii. 4, 5. *To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

AS in the natural life, so in the spiritual, a state of maturity is attained by a slow and gradual progression; but every one should be aspiring after a further growth in grace, in order that he may reach the full measure of the stature of Christ. For this end the apostle exhorts those, who had tasted that the Lord is gracious, to covet the sincere milk of the word; and to come continually to Christ, in order to their more abundant edification in faith and love. His allusions to the material temple are worthy of our attentive consideration: he compares Christ to the foundation-stone, and believers to the other stones built upon it; thereby shewing, that the temple had a typical reference to them,

I. In its foundation

Christ is here represented as the foundation-stone on which all are built

[When personally considered, Christ is represented as the temple itself, in which dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead ^a: but, as considered in relation to his people, he is the foundation-stone, that supports the whole edifice ^b. The quality ascribed to this stone is indeed singular, but it is perfectly suited to him of whom it is spoken. Christ is called “a living” stone, not merely as being of distinguished excellence (as he is also the “living bread,” and “living water”) but as having life in himself, and being the author of life to all who depend upon him: a quickening energy proceeds from him, which pervades and animates every part of this spiritual fabric ^c.]

In this situation He is precious to all who know him

[He has indeed in all ages been “disallowed of men,” who, blinded by Satan and their own lusts, neither “saw any beauty in him for which he was to be desired,” “nor would come to him that they might have life.” The very persons appointed
to

^a John ii. 19—21.

^b Isai. xxviii. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^c John v. 21. 26.

to build the temple have been the first to reject him^d: they could not endure that so much honour should be put upon him; or that they should be constrained to acknowledge him as the one source of all their stability. But he was "chosen of God" from all eternity, as the only Being capable of supporting the weight of this vast edifice; and, so perfectly is he suited to his place, that "he is precious" to God, and precious to all who are built upon him. If all the angels in heaven were ordered to fill his place but for a moment, the whole building would fall to ruins: but in him there is a suitableness and sufficiency, that at once delights the heart of God^e, and inspires his people with implicit confidence.]

Nor is the foundation only of the temple typical; there is a typical reference also

II. In its superstructure

Believers are the stones of which the temple is composed

[Every man, in his natural state, is as the stones in a quarry, ignorant of the end to which he is destined, and incapable of doing any thing towards the accomplishment of it. But the great Master-builder, by the instrumentality of those who labour under his direction, selects some from the rest, and fashions them for the places which he intends them to occupy in this spiritual building. But, as the temple of Solomon was built without the noise of an axe or hammer, or any other tool^f, so are these brought in a silent manner^g, and "fitly framed together for an habitation of God through the Spirit^h."]]

By "coming to Christ" they are gradually built up upon him

[Believers, quickened by Christ, become "lively," or living "stones," like unto Christ himself: "they live by him," yea, he himself is their lifeⁱ. Notwithstanding therefore they have of themselves no power, through his quickening spirit they become voluntary agents; and though it is true that they are "drawn to him by the Father^k," yet it is also true, that they "come to him" willingly, and with strong desire. And this is the way in which "they are built up a spiritual house:" by "coming to him" they are placed upon him; and by coming to him yet again and again, they derive "more abundant life" from him; they are more and more fitted for the place they occupy; they are more closely knit to all the other parts of this sacred building, and more firmly established on him as their one foundation. It is thus that the

^d Acts iv. 11.

^e Isai. xlii. 1.

^f 1 Kings vi. 7.

^g Job xxxiii. 15, 16. Acts xvi. 14.

^h Eph. ii. 21, 22.

ⁱ Col. iii. 4.

^k John vi. 44.

the fabric itself is enlarged by the constant addition of fresh materials; and thus that "every part of the building groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."]

A similar view must yet further be taken of the temple

III. In its services

The same persons, who before were represented as the stones of the building, are now, by an easy transition, spoken of as the priests officiating in it.

Believers are "an holy priesthood"

[None could officiate in the material temple but those of the tribe of Levi: but, in the spiritual temple, all are priests, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female: "The chosen generation are also a royal priesthood¹;" who are not only entitled, but bound, to transact their own business with God. This honour also they attain by "coming unto Christ:" by him they are "made kings and priests unto God;" and "through him they have boldness to enter into the holiest," and to present themselves before the Majesty of heaven.]

Nor shall the sacrifices which they offer be presented in vain

[They come not indeed with the blood of bulls and of goats; but they bring the infinitely more precious blood of Christ. On account of his atonement, their prayers and praises, their alms and oblations, yea, all their works of righteousness come up with a sweet savour before God, and their persons as well as services find a favourable acceptance in his sight^m. Nor though, through the infirmity of their flesh, their offerings be very imperfect, shall they therefore be despised: if only they be presented with an humble and willing mind, God, even under the law, and much more under the gospel, has promised to accept themⁿ.]

Let us LEARN from this subject

1. Our duty

[Whatever be our attainments in the divine life, we have one daily and hourly employment, to be "coming to Christ:" by these means we shall be advanced and established; but, if we neglect them, we shall fall and perish. Nor must the opinions of men be of any weight when opposed to this duty: whoever despise, we must "choose" him; whoever abhor, we must account him "precious:" if the whole universe should combine against him, we must be firm in our adherence to him.

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^m Heb. xiii. 15, 16.

ⁿ Lev. xxii. 19—23. 2 Cor. viii. 12.

him. Nor must we rest in cold uninfluential professions of regard. We must devote ourselves to him, while we build upon him; and present ourselves, and all that we possess, as living sacrifices unto our God and Father.]

2. Our privilege

[Being brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ, it is our privilege to maintain fellowship with him as our reconciled God. We should banish all doubts about the acceptance of our feeble endeavours; and come, like the high priest himself, even to his mercy-seat, there to make known our wants, and obtain the blessings we stand in need of. Methinks our state on earth should resemble, in a measure, the state of those in heaven: we should possess the same humble confidence, the same holy joy: and our sacrifices, enflamed with heavenly fire, should ever be ascending from the altar of a grateful heart, that God may smell a sweet savour, and "rejoice over us to do us good."

Thrice happy they who so walk before him! Let it be the ambition of us all to do so: then shall we indeed be "Temples of the Holy Ghost;" we shall "draw nigh to God, and God will draw nigh to us;" we shall "dwell in God, and God will dwell in us;" and the communion, begun on earth, shall be carried on and perfected in glory.]

° 1 Cor. vi. 19.

CXXIX. THE HOLY OF HOLIES A TYPE OF HEAVEN.

Heb. ix. 24. *Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*

IT appears, at first sight, unworthy of God to appoint with such precision every the minutest circumstance relating to the tabernacle and its services. Provided he were worshipped and served, it should seem a matter of no importance whether the place, wherein he was worshipped, were of such or such an exact form, or whether the ceremonies observed in his worship were exactly of such or such a kind. But God intended to prefigure every thing relating to the Messiah and his kingdom: and therefore it was necessary not only that a model of every thing should be given to Moses^a, but that these

^a Heb. viii. 5.

these patterns of heavenly things, made by Moses according to that model, should undergo a purification by the blood of carnal sacrifices, that so the heavenly things themselves, which were to be purified by the great sacrifice, might be the more evidently prefigured^b. These types having been given, Christ accomplished them on earth in part, and is now perfecting the accomplishment of them in heaven; whither he is gone, as the high priests went into the holy of holies, to appear before God on behalf of his people.

It is our intention to shew

I. In what respect heaven was typified by the holy of holies

The whole edifice of the tabernacle or temple was a figure of Christ's human nature, in which the Godhead dwelt; and of the church also, in which God resides^c. But the most holy place, which is also called "the tabernacle^d," eminently represented heaven:

1. It was the immediate residence of the Deity

[The Shechinah, the bright cloud, which was the symbol of the Deity, dwelt between the cherubims upon the mercy-seat; and there God manifested himself more than in any other place on earth^e. Thus also, but in an infinitely brighter manner, does he display his glory in heaven. He is indeed on earth and even in hell; neither can the heaven of heavens contain him; for he pervades all space. But, though he is on our right hand, we cannot see him; nor, if we look for him on the left hand, can he be found by us^f. But in heaven he is seen face to face; and all the heavenly hosts behold him shining forth in all the brightness of his glory.]

2. It was inaccessible, except with the blood of sacrifices

[No person whatever was to enter into the sanctuary, except the high priest, nor could *he*, except on the great day of annual expiation; nor even then, except with the blood of beasts, that had been offered in sacrifice to God. Thus is there no admittance into heaven but through the blood of our great sacrifice. Not even our great high priest himself, when he had become the surety and substitute of sinners, could enter there without his own precious blood^g; and heaven itself needed,

^b Ver. 23.

^d Ver. 3.

^e Ver. 12.

^c John ii. 19, 21. 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

^e Exod. xxv. 22.

^f Job xxiii. 8, 9.

needed, as it were, to be purified from the defilement it contracted through the admission of sinners into it, even as the sanctuary, with all the vessels of it, were purified from the pollutions they had contracted through the ministration of sinful man ^h.]

3. It was the repository of all the principal memorials of God's power and grace

[The apostle enumerates the various things which were deposited in the holy of holies ⁱ; all of them, either memorials of God's providential care, or exhibitions of his covenant love. And are they not all in heaven, concentrated and combined in the person of Christ? Christ is the true ark, in which the law is kept, and fulfilled: and, while he makes intercession for his people, he is also the food of their souls, and the performer of all those miracles of grace that are wrought on their behalf. We cannot behold him, but we must immediately be persuaded that God is able and willing to save us to the uttermost.]

But while we see that the true tabernacle, even heaven itself, was prefigured by the holy places made with hands, let us consider

II. The end for which our Lord ascended thither

Our Lord could not go into the earthly tabernacle, because he was not of that tribe, to which the priesthood belonged: but into the heavenly sanctuary he went

1. As our forerunner

[God has ordained, that all his people should one day dwell with him around his throne. All true penitents now are priests unto God, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, male or female ^k: and Jesus is gone, as he himself tells us, to prepare places for them ^l. He is expressly said to be gone within the vail as our forerunner ^m. Let us then contemplate him in this view; and look forward to the time when we shall follow him within the vail, and "be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."]

2. As our head and representative

[It was not as an individual merely that Christ ascended
into

^h Ver. 21, 23. with Lev xvi. 16.

ⁱ Ver. 4, 5. The apostle does not say, that the censer, or altar of incense, as θυμιατηριον may signify, was in the holy of holies, (for it was on the outside of the vail) but that the holy of holies *had* it: *that* being of very distinguished use, when the high priest entered within the vail.

^k Rev. i. 6.

^l John xiv. 2, 3.

^m Heb. vi. 20

into heaven, but as the head and representative of his redeemed people. All that he did and suffered was in their place and stead. Hence they are said to be "circumcised in him," and to be "buried with him in baptism," and "crucified with him." In the same capacity also he went within the vail, to appear in the presence of God for us. Hence we are said to be "risen with him," yea, to be already "sitting with him in heavenly places." And on this our hope greatly depends: for, *because* "our life is hid with Christ in God, we may be assured that, when he shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory."]

3. As our advocate and high priest

[It is in this view that the apostle principally speaks of him in the text. The end for which the high priest entered into the typical sanctuary, was, to present the blood of the sacrifice, and to cover the mercy-seat with the clouds of incense. It was precisely thus that Jesus went into the heaven of heavens for us. He is gone to present his own blood before the throne of God, and to plead the merit of that blood on behalf of sinful men. And it is on this very account that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, namely, because he ever liveth to make intercession for them^p.]

INFER

1. How excellent is the gospel salvation!

[The Mosaic œconomy was excellent in comparison of the state of heathens, because it provided a way of acceptance with God, a way too, that was of divine appointment. But the gospel points out to us a far greater Priest, officiating in a nobler tabernacle, presenting an infinitely richer sacrifice, and offering a more powerful intercession on our behalf. Let us then value this gospel, and search into its contents, and seek its blessings with our whole hearts.]

2. What encouragement have all to embrace and to hold fast this gospel!

[Were any thing wanting to complete the work of salvation for us, we might well hesitate, before we embraced the overtures of the gospel. But a view of Christ as our high priest dissipates our fears, and encourages both the weakest and the vilest to come to God through him. "If any man sin," says the apostle, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the propitiation for our sins^q." Again it is said, "Seeing we have a great High Priest, *that is passed into the heavens*, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession^r:" and again, "Having boldness

to

^p Eph. ii. 6.

^q Col. iii. 3, 4.

^r Heb. vii. 25.

^s 1 John ii. 2.

^t Heb. iv. 14.

to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith^s." Let us then make this improvement of the subject; so shall we, each in his appointed order, appear before God for ourselves, and dwell in his immediate presence for ever and ever.]

^s Heb. ix. 19, 21, 22.

CXXX. THE WAY OF ACCESS TO GOD THROUGH THE VAIL.

Heb. x. 19—22. *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

MAN, by the fall, lost that intercourse with God which he had maintained in his state of innocence. The intent of Christianity is to restore him to the enjoyment of his privilege. Hence the inspired writers urge the great doctrines of the gospel, not merely as truths which are to be believed, but as motives which are to animate and direct our conduct. The author of this epistle has set forth at large the correspondence between our blessed Lord, and the typical representations which were given of him under the Mosaic law. He now proceeds to the practical improvement of his subject. In the words before us he opens

I. The grounds of our access to God

They who are ignorant of their own extreme guilt and helplessness, imagine that they can come to God without any mediator. But the scriptures uniformly declare that the way of access to him is

1. Through the atonement

[The original way of access to God by the covenant of works was shut up for ever upon the first transgression. Nor does that typical way which was appointed under the law continue any longer. There is "a new way" now opened to us
 ,11 through

through the veil. The human nature of Christ was represented by the veil of the temple. At the very instant that his body expired upon the cross, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom^a. That being the precise time of the evening sacrifice, all the worshippers in the temple had a perfect view of the holy of holies. Thus an intimation was given to them, that, by the rending of Christ's body, the way into the most holy place was opened indiscriminately to all. As the high priest went into the typical sanctuary with the blood of the sacrifice, so might all from henceforth go into the very heaven of heavens, as it were, with the blood of Jesus. This way was now "consecrated for them" by Jesus himself. It was a *new* way, not only because it was different from that which had existed before, but because it should never wax old or vanish as the other had done^b. And it was a *living* way, because, while the former way prohibited access to all, except the high priest, under the penalty of death, this infallibly imparts life to all who come to God in it.]

2. Through the intercession of Christ

[The church of God is that "house" which the temple of Solomon prefigured. In it God dwells in a more immediate manner than he ever did by the shechinah upon the mercy-seat^c. Christ, as the great high priest, presides over this house. He is gone with his own blood into the holy of holies^d. He is there sprinkling it on our behalf in the presence of his heavenly Father. There also is He offering the incense of his continual intercession. Under the law, the hopes of the Israelites were founded on the intercession of their high priest. In vain was the sacrifice killed, if its blood was not carried within the veil: and in vain would it be carried thither, if it were not sprinkled before the mercy-seat, and accompanied with the clouds of incense. Thus not even the death of Christ is, of itself, a sufficient warrant for us to draw nigh to God. But his intercession added to it gives us boldness, and access with confidence^e. We may go to God upon this ground as to a reconciled father. Nor need any sinner whatever deem himself too unworthy to approach his throne. All are now constituted priests unto God^f. And all who bring the blood of Christ with them, and rely on his prevailing intercession, shall surely find acceptance with him.]

There is however something further which the worshippers of God must attend to, namely,

II. The manner in which we should approach him

Christians

^a Matt. xxvii. 51.

^b Heb. viii. 13.

^c 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^d Heb. ix. 12.

^e Heb. vii. 25.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. i. 6.

Christians are not to go to God with a rude and inconsiderate familiarity. They should consider the majesty of Him before whom they come; and should draw near to him with

A sincere heart

[To go before God and declare things which we neither feel nor believe, is to mock and insult him. If our confessions be without humility, our petitions without fervor, and our thanksgivings without gratitude, how is it possible that God should hear us? If we draw nigh to him with our lips while our hearts are far from him, we worship him in vain^g. To have imbibed true notions, is not sufficient. God requires truth in our inward parts^h. And they alone can worship him acceptably, who worship him in spirit and in truthⁱ.]

An assured faith

[When we go to God in prayer, we should not doubt whether He be willing to accept us. We should be thoroughly persuaded that "Christ is the way, the truth, and the life^k." And that he will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. To be assured of our own personal interest in him is not necessary. But we should have the most assured belief of the sufficiency of his atonement and intercession. Nor should we limit his power and grace under an idea of our own unworthiness. To ask with a doubtful mind, is to cast a reflection upon him at the very time that we are imploring his favour. And we are warned by God himself that such wavering petitions never shall prevail^l.]

A good conscience

[The Conscience of every man has been more or less defiled. Nor could the offerings under the law perfect a man with respect to it^m. But the blood of Jesus will cleanse it from its defilementⁿ. And, if we heartily endeavour to keep it void of offence in future, we shall enjoy the testimony of a *good* conscience^o. But if we live in the habitual neglect of any duty, or the allowed commission of any sin, we shall have an *evil* and accusing conscience. It is necessary therefore that our hearts be purged from the guilt of sin by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, and from the love and practice of sin by his Spirit. Without this we can never approach God with comfort or acceptance. We shall stand self-condemned as hypocrites. And every petition we offer will appear a solemn mockery of God. We must therefore have our hearts purified

^g Matt. xv. 8, 9.

^k John xiv. 6.

ⁿ Heb. ix. 14.

^h Ps. li. 6.

ⁱ Jam. i. 6, 7.

^o 2 Cor. i. 12.

ⁱ John iv. 24.

^m Heb. ix. 9.

purified from all habitual and allowed sin. Nor unless we have, can we hope for any answer of peace unto our souls^p.]

An holy conversation^q

[As our inward principle must be pure, so must also our outward practice be. The priests washed their flesh before they went within the vail, to denote the purity which was required of them by God^r. Thus must we also be careful to possess that purity, if we would approach him with acceptance. Not that our sanctity of heart and life will procure us favour in his sight. The only grounds of our acceptance have been before stated. But there is a meetness for the enjoying of his benefits. And if we possess not that meetness, in vain shall we expect the benefits themselves.]

APPLICATION

[Some may ask, What shall I do, seeing I possess not these requisites? Shall I stay away from the throne of grace entirely? We answer, No; If we cannot ask as we ought, we should ask as we can. God will assist us if we endeavour to serve him aright; and will impart to us those holy dispositions, that shall qualify us for the reception of his richest blessings. Let us then thankfully improve the liberty he has afforded us. Let us see the vail now rent asunder, and behold our God upon his mercy-seat. Behold, his address to every one of us is, Draw nigh unto me, and I will draw nigh to you; cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded^s. In obedience to his command, let us surround his throne with fervent importunity. Let us ask for mercy and grace to help us in every time of need^t; and so open our mouths wide before him that He may fill and satisfy us with good things^u. Thus shall we enjoy the sweetest fellowship with him in this world; and shortly be admitted to his more immediate presence in the world to come.]

^p Prov. xxviii. 9. Ps. lxvi. 18.

^q The last clause of the text might properly begin the next verse; in which case it must be referred to our baptismal washing, and the solemn engagements consequent upon it.

^r Lev. xvi. 4.

^s Jam. iv. 8.

^t Heb. iv. 16.

^u Ps. lxxx. 10.

CXXXI. ACCESS TO GOD BY THE PRIESTHOOD.

Eph. ii. 18. *Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

AS there is no question more important, so there is none more beyond the reach of unassisted reason, than
that

that which Balak put to Balaam, "Wherewith shall I come before the most high God?" Many are the expedients which have been devised for obtaining acceptance with God: but there has been only one true way from the beginning, namely, through the sacrifice of Christ. This has been gradually revealed to man with increasing clearness; but was never fully manifested till the days of the apostles. The sacrifices of the Mosaic law threw considerable light upon this interesting subject: yet, while they revealed, they tended also to obscure it: for the Gentiles were forbidden to enter into the sanctuary; and had a court assigned them, called the court of the Gentiles^a. If they became proselytes to the Jewish religion, they were, together with the Jews, received into the sanctuary, or outer court of the temple. The priests and Levites were admitted into the inner court; and the high priest into the holy of holies; but *that* only on one day in the year. Now the apostle tells us, that by these distinctions "the Holy Ghost signified, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." But in due time Christ himself appeared; and by his death, both fulfilled and abrogated the ceremonial law: since which period the difference between Jew and Gentile has no longer subsisted; the partition wall was thrown down; and the vail of the temple was rent in twain, in token that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, were henceforth to have an equal access to God through Christ.

It is our present intention to shew

I. The way of access to the Father

The text contains a brief summary of all that God has revealed upon this subject: it informs us that the way to the Father is

1. Through the Son

[The high priest under the law was the mediator through whom the people drew nigh to God: and by his typical mediation we see how *we* are to approach our God. He entered into the holy place with the blood of the sacrifices, and afterwards burnt incense before the mercy-seat; representing, by the former, *the sacrifice of Christ*; and, by the latter, *his prevailing intercession*. Without the blood of Christ offered in sacrifice for

^a Ezek. xlii. 20.

for us, no man could ever have found acceptance with God. Nor would that have availed, if he had not also gone within the vail to be "our advocate with the Father, as well as the propitiation for our sins." Even if we had been pardoned in consideration of his death, our reconciliation with God would not have continued long: we should soon have renewed our transgressions, and have provoked God utterly to destroy us. But, by this twofold mediation of Christ, divine Justice is satisfied for the offences we have already committed, and the peace that has been effected is maintained inviolate. Now our Lord himself declares that there is no other way to the Father but this^b: and St. Paul assures us, that, in this way, we may all draw nigh to God with boldness and confidence^c.]

2. By the Spirit

[We know not how to pray to God aright, unless the Holy Spirit help our infirmities and teach us^d. We have no will to approach him, unless the Holy Spirit incline our hearts^e. Even in the regenerate there still remains so strong a disinclination to prayer, that unless God draw them by the influences of his Spirit, they find an almost insuperable reluctance to that duty. Moreover, we have no power to exercise spiritual affections at a throne of grace, unless the Spirit, as "a spirit of grace and of supplication," give us a broken and a contrite heart^f. Without his aid, we are only like a ship, whose sails are spread in vain, unless there be a wind to fill them. Even Paul, it should seem, had never prayed aright till his conversion; and then it was said, "Behold he prayeth." Lastly, without the Spirit, we have no confidence to address the Majesty of heaven. We are deterred by a sense of guilt; and are ready to think that it would be presumption in us to ask any thing at his hands. The Holy Ghost must be in us as "a spirit of adoption, before we can cry, Abba, Father^g." Yea, to such a degree are the mouths of God's dearest children sometimes shut by a sense of guilt, that the Holy Spirit himself maketh intercession in them no other way than by sighs and groans^h. Thus, as there is a necessity for the mediation of Christ to remove our guilt, so is there also of the Spirit's influence on account of our weakness; since, without his assistance, we have no *knowledge* of our wants, no *will* to seek a supply of them, no *power* to spread them before God, nor any *confidence* to plead with importunity and faith.]

The

^b John xiv. 6.

^d Rom. viii. 26.

^f Zech. xii. 10.

^h Rom. viii. 26, latter part.

^c Heb. x. 19—22.

^e Cant. i. 4.

^g Rom. viii. 15.

The path being thus clearly marked, let us consider

II. The excellency of this way

Waving many things whereby this topic might be illustrated, we shall content ourselves with observing, that this way of access to God

1. Gives us a wonderful discovery of God himself

[What an astonishing view does this give us of the divine *Nature*! Here we see manifestly the existence of three persons in the Godhead. Here we see the Father, *to* whom we are to draw nigh, together with the Son, *through* whom, and the Spirit, *by* whom, we are to approach him. These are evidently distinct, though subsisting in one undivided essence. Moreover the offices of the three persons in the Trinity are so appropriate, that we cannot speak of them otherwise than they are here declared: we cannot say, that through the Spirit, and by the Father, we have access to Christ; or that through the Father, and by Christ, we have access to the Spirit: this would be to confound what the scripture keeps perfectly distinct. The Father is the Original Fountain of the Deity: Christ is the Mediator, through whom we approach him: and the Spirit is the Agent, by whom we are enabled to approach him. That each of these divine persons is God, is as plainly revealed, as that there is a God: and yet we are sure that there is but *one* God. It is not for us to unravel this mystery; but with humility and gratitude to adore that God, who has so mysteriously revealed his nature to us.

While we are led thus to view God as he exists in himself, we cannot but contemplate also his *goodness* to us. What greater mark of it can be conceived, than that the sacred Three should so interest themselves in our salvation? That the Father should devise such a way for our acceptance with him; that the Son should open the way by his meritorious death, and his prevailing intercession; and that the Holy Spirit should condescend to guide us into it, and to keep us in it even to the end! That these offices should be sustained and executed for the salvation of such insignificant and worthless, yea, such guilty, and rebellious creatures, may well excite our wonder, and furnish us with matter of endless praise and thanksgiving.]

2. Is calculated to produce the most salutary effects on the minds of men

[What consideration can be more *awakening* than that which necessarily arises from the subject before us? Was such a dispensation necessary in order to our restoration to the divine favour? Must the Father send his only Son to die for us? Must the Son atone and intercede for us? Must the Holy

Ghost descend and dwell in our hearts? Can none of us be saved in any other way than this? How deep then must have been our fall; how desperate our condition! And how inconceivably dreadful must our state be, if we neglect so great salvation!

On the other hand, what can be more *encouraging* than to see that such abundant provision has been made for us? What can a sinner desire more? What clearer evidence can he have of the Father's willingness to receive him? What firmer ground of confidence can he desire, than the sacrifice and intercession of the Lord Jesus? What further aid can he want, who has the Holy Spirit to instruct, assist, and sanctify him? Surely none can despond, however great their guilt may be, or however inveterate their corruptions.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who never seek access to God in prayer

[Our Lord told the Jews that "if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but that now they had no cloke for their sin." How truly may this be said to those, who refuse to come to God in the way pointed out for them! Surely they must be without excuse, and, if they continue in their sin, without hope also: for in no other way than this can we draw nigh to God; nor will God in any other way draw nigh to us.]

2. Those who fear that they shall not find acceptance with God

[There can be no ground for such fears, provided we really desire to go to God in his appointed way. The more we consider the condescension and grace of God in providing such means for our recovery, the more must we be persuaded that God will cast out none that come unto him. Only let us "open our mouths wide, and he will fill them." We may "ask what we will in the name of Jesus, and it shall be done unto us."]

3. Those who enjoy sweet communion with God

[This is the highest of all privileges, and the richest of all enjoyments. To have access to the Father with boldness and confidence is a foretaste even of heaven itself. Let us then abound more and more in the duty of prayer; for when we can say with the apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ," we may also add with a full assurance, "And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."]

CXXXII. THE JEWISH SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF
CHRIST'S.

Heb. ix. 13, 14. *If the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

THE peculiar benefits of Christianity are usually displayed by contrasting our state with that of the heathen world: but they will be seen nearly to the same advantage, if we compare our privileges with those that were enjoyed under the Jewish dispensation. The Jews indeed had much that distinguished them above other nations: but we possess in substance what they enjoyed only in the shadow. One great object in the Epistle to the Hebrews is, to set this matter in a just point of view. This has been done with great perspicuity and strength of argument in the preceding context: and the author, having shewn that we have a true, and *eternal* redemption obtained for us, while that accomplished by the Jewish ordinances was only typical and *temporal*, states afresh, in few words, the grounds of his conclusion; and appeals to every intelligent reader for the justness of it.

In discoursing on his words we shall shew

I. The excellence of the type

The Jewish ordinances were altogether typical of Christ's sacrifice

[The ordinances mentioned in the text, though similar, as means of purifying from pollution, were very different from each other as to the kind of pollution which they were intended to remove. The blood of bullocks and goats was offered annually on the great day of expiation, to atone for the *moral* guilt both of the priests and people^a. The ashes of the heifer, which, together with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet, had been burnt without the camp, were to be mixed with running water, and sprinkled upon a person who had contracted any *ceremonial* uncleanness (as from the touch of a grave, a corpse,

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^a Lev. xvi. 6, 15.

an human bone, or any thing that had been touched by an unclean person). On the third day, and on the seventh, they were to be sprinkled on him; and then he was to be esteemed clean^b. These were typical of Christ's sacrifice, by which the greatest sins may be forgiven; and without which, not even the smallest pollution imaginable can ever be purged away.]

As types, these certainly were deserving of much regard

[While they shadowed forth, and prepared men for, the Messiah that should come, they conveyed many real benefits to those who conformed to the rules which they prescribed. The penitents who bewailed their moral defilements, had their hopes of mercy and forgiveness revived and strengthened: and they who, on account of some ceremonial uncleanness, were separated for seven long days from the house of God, and from all intercourse with their dearest friends, were restored, as it were, to the bosom of the church, and to communion with their God. Doubtless these rites were burthensome; but every one who valued the favour of God, and the blessings of social converse, would thankfully use the means which God had prescribed for the renewed enjoyment of them.]

Nevertheless the things, which were glorious in themselves, lost all their glory when contrasted with

II. The superior excellence of the antitype

As, by a type, we mean a shadowy representation of something future and substantial; so, by an antitype^c, we mean that thing which corresponds to the type, and had before been represented by it. The antitype then, or the thing that has been before represented, is, the sacrifice of Christ: and *this* infinitely excels all the ordinances by which it had been shadowed forth. The superior excellence of this appears particularly, in that

1. It purifies the conscience

[The legal offerings never could remove guilt from the conscience^d: they were mere remembrances of sins^e; and the constant repetition of them shewed that those, which had been before offered, had not availed for the full discharge of the persons who offered them^f. But the blood of Christ, once sprinkled on the conscience, "perfects for ever them that are sanctified^g." No other atonement is then wanted, or desired:

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^b Numb. xix. 12.

^d Heb. ix. 9.

^f Heb. x. 2.

^c Ἀντίτυπος. 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^e Heb. x. 3, 4.

^g Ib. ver. 10, 14.

the sinner needs only to exercise faith on that, and he will have peace in his soul; "being justified by faith, he shall have peace with God." How strongly does this mark the superiority which we ascribe to the sacrifice of Christ!]

2. It sanctifies the life

[Though the Jewish ordinances availed for the restoration of men to the enjoyment of outward privileges, they never could renew and sanctify the heart. On the contrary, they rather tended to irritate the minds of men against both the law, and him that enjoined it. But the blood of Christ sprinkled on the soul, instantly produces a visible change in the whole man: "the dead works" which were daily practised with delight, are now abandoned; and "the service of the living God," which before appeared irksome, is now its chief joy. It is undeniable that many in every place throughout the world (wherever the gospel is preached) have undergone a very great change in all their views, desires, and pursuits; they have become dead to the things of time and sense, and have devoted themselves in body, soul and spirit, to the service of their God. Let the question be put to all of them, When did this change take place? there will be but one answer from them all: they will with one voice acknowledge, that it was effected by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their hearts and consciences; that, till that blessed period, they were altogether carnal; and that from that time, they have been under the habitual influence of spiritual affections. What more can be wanting to establish the point before us?]

The pre-eminence of Christ above the legal offerings will yet further appear, while we shew

III. How it is that the transcendent worth of the one may be inferred from the comparative trifling value of the other

The apostle's argument in the text is this; If the Jewish sacrifices availed for the smallest good, how much more will the sacrifice of Christ avail for the greatest possible good? The force of this argument will appear by comparing

1. The nature of the offerings

[The blood that was sprinkled on men under the law, was merely the blood of worthless beasts: but what is that which is sprinkled on us? Let the voice of inspiration answer this question; It was "GOD that purchased the church with *his own blood*^h." Astonishing mystery! "the blood of Christ"

was

^h Acts xx. 28.

was the blood, not of a mere man, but of one who was God as well as man. How plain is the inference in this view! Surely, if the blood of a beast, which was only externally "spotless," availed for *any* thing, much more may the blood of Christ, that immaculate Lamb, avail for *every* thing.]

2. The persons by whom they were offered

[Under the law the offerings were presented by sinful men, who needed first to offer for their own sins, before they were permitted to offer for the people's. But our sacrifice was offered by God himself: Christ was both the sacrifice and the priest: yea, each person of the ever-blessed Trinity was engaged in this stupendous work: the Father was the person to whom the sacrifice was offered; Christ was the person who offered it; and "the Eternal Spirit" concurred and co-operated with him in this mysterious act. Let then the offerings be compared in this view, and how infinite will the superiority of Christ's appear!]

3. The suitableness of each to the end proposed

[What was there in the blood of bulls and goats that could wash away the stain of sin! How could that satisfy the divine Justice, or avert his wrath from sinful man? there was not the least affinity between the means and the end. But Christ was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;" and he assumed our nature on purpose that he might stand in our place and stead. Here was a perfect suitableness between the means and the end. Must the penalty due to sin be endured? He became a curse for us, and submitted to endure its just deserts. Must the law be fulfilled and honoured? He magnified it by his perfect obedience. And being God as well as man, he was at liberty to do this *for us*; and his substitution in our place is justly available for our salvation. How plain then is the apostle's inference when viewed in this light! Surely, when these considerations are all combined, there will be a strength in his argument, and a force in his appeal, which must bear down every objection, and fix the deepest conviction on our minds.]

This subject may further lead us to OBSERVE

1. How manifest is the doctrine of the divinity of Christ!

[We need not look to any passages that confirm this doctrine by direct assertions; since in the text it is contained with yet stronger evidence in a way of implication. Let it be supposed for one moment that Christ was a mere creature: how will the apostle's argument then appear? If the blood of one creature avails for the obtaining of a mere shadowy and

temporal benefit, how much more shall the blood of another creature avail for the obtaining of all that God himself can bestow? 'This were as absurd as to say, if a child can lift a feather, how much more can a grown person lift a mountain? Such an appeal would be unworthy of any man that pretends to common sense; and much more of an inspired apostle. But let the divinity of Christ be acknowledged, and the appeal is clear, convincing, incontrovertible. Indeed the doctrines of the atonement and of the divinity of Christ are so interwoven with each other, that neither of them can be denied without effectually subverting both. Let us seek then to be well established in these important truths.]

2. How necessary is it to trust entirely in Christ's atonement!

[It is not possible to state a case more strongly than this is stated in a chapter before referred to¹. We cannot conceive less guilt to be contracted by any act than by unwillingly touching a thing, which, unknown to us, had been before touched by an unclean person: yet nothing but the sprinkling of the ashes of a red heifer could ever remove the uncleanness contracted by it: if the person that had contracted it were the holiest man on earth, and were to shed rivers of tears on account of what he had done, and increase his circumspection in future an hundredfold, it would be all to no purpose; he must die as a defiler of God's sanctuary, if he did not use the purification which the law appointed. How much more then must that soul perish which is not purified by the blood of Christ! How impossible is it that even the smallest sin should ever be expiated in any other way! Let this then teach us to look unto Christ continually, and to have our consciences ever sprinkled with his precious blood.]

3. How inseparable is the connexion between faith and works!

[They greatly err, who think that the doctrines of faith are subversive of morality. The very faith that purges the conscience from guilt, purifies the life also from dead works, and animates us to serve the living God. Let this connexion then be seen in our lives; so shall we most effectually remove the calumny; and "by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."]

¹ Numb. xix.

CCXXXIII. THE BURNT-SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF
CHRIST.

Heb. xiii. 11—13. *The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burnt without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*

SUCH is the proneness of men to superstition, that they need to watch with care, lest, after having once shaken off its fetters, they be again subjected to its dominion. The Hebrew Christians in particular were liable to be drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel: their fond attachment to the law of Moses, seconded by the subtile arguments of Judaizing teachers, exposed them to continual danger. Hence the inspired author of this epistle cautioned them against returning to their former bondage. And, lest they should be led to think, that by renouncing the law of Moses, they deprived themselves of the blessings which were procured by their sacrifices, he tells them, that this was by no means the case; yea, that, on the contrary, they were partakers of a better altar, to which the adherents to Judaism had no access; and that the very ordinances, in which the Jews trusted, pointed out this truth in a clear and convincing manner; for not even the high priest himself was permitted to eat of the sacrifices, whose blood he had carried within the vail; whereas every true Christian was permitted to eat of that sacrifice which alone could atone for sin; and therefore, so far from there being any necessity for them to revert to Judaism in order to partake of the Jewish sacrifices, the Jews themselves must be converted to Christianity in order to obtain the full benefit even of those sacrifices which they themselves had offered^a.

To illustrate this more fully, we shall point out

- I. The correspondence between the death of Christ, and the ordinances whereby it was prefigured.

The

^a This seems to be the true scope of the passage as connected with the context.

The most minute particulars of the death of Christ were typified under the law: but we shall fix our attention at present on that only which is specified in the text.

The sacrifices on the great day of annual expiation were to be burnt without the camp

[The sacrifices on the great day of atonement were distinguished far above all others, and accompanied with circumstances of peculiar solemnity. Their blood was carried within the vail, and sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, as the means of propitiating the incensed Deity, and of obtaining pardon for the sins committed by the whole nation through the preceding year. A part of most other sacrifices belonged to the priest who offered them: but of this not the smallest portion was to be preserved for the use of man: all, except the fat which was consumed upon the altar, was carried without the camp (in later ages, without the *city* of Jerusalem) to be destroyed by fire^b. Probably this was intended to exhibit God's indignation against sin, and to shew how utterly *they* must be consumed by the fire of his wrath, who should not be interested in this atonement. But the words before us reflect a light on this ordinance, which it is of great importance to observe. The burning of *the whole* of these sacrifices shewed that *no legal services whatever could entitle a person to partake of them*: not even the high priest himself, who carried their blood within the vail, had any privilege beyond the poorest and meanest of the people. *They* could obtain an interest in them *only* by faith; nor could *he* taste of them in any other way: though his services were the most sacred, and his access to God far more intimate than any other person, or even he himself at any other period could enjoy, yet had he no more part in this atonement than every other person might have by the exercise of faith: and consequently they, who, under the Christian dispensation, should trust in the sacrifice of Christ, would participate the benefits, from which the high priest himself should be excluded, if he rested in the outward services without looking through them to the great, the true Atonement.]

Agreeably to this typical ordinance, our Lord suffered without the gate of Jerusalem

[The death of Christ was that which the annual sacrifices typically represented. He died for sin, and, after he had offered himself upon the cross, entered into heaven itself with
his

^b Lev. vi. 30. and xvi. 27.

his own blood, there to present it before the Father on our behalf: and it was by this means that he “sanctified,” or consecrated to himself, a peculiar people, who should for ever enjoy the virtue of his atonement — — — But, in order that his death might produce the full effect, it was necessary that it should be conformed in every respect to the ordinances whereby it had been prefigured: hence it was accomplished “without the gate” of Jerusalem; so strictly did it accord with the most minute particulars, that had been before determined in the divine counsels.

Whether there was any mystery couched under this event, we cannot absolutely determine. We should not indeed have discerned perhaps any thing particular in it, if light had not been thrown upon it by an inspired writer. But, as we are certain that this event was a completion of the pre-existing ordinance, it is not improbable that it might have some further signification. While it shews us, to what a degree “Christ became a curse for us,” it may also intimate, that the virtue of his sacrifice was not to be confined, to those who were within the pale of the Jewish church, but rather, to extend to those who were without it, even to the whole Gentile world.]

The exhortation, which the apostle grounds upon these circumstances, leads us to point out

II. The conformity, which Christians also are to bear, both to the law and to him who fulfilled it

Doubtless, every thing which Christ has done for us, entails on us an obligation to conform ourselves to his mind and will. But the circumstances before considered, suggest to us some appropriate and important duties.

1. We must renounce all legal hopes, that we may depend on Christ

[The particular injunction to go forth to Christ without the camp, intimates, that we must turn our back upon all the legal services, and trust alone in that sacrifice, which he offered without the gate. The importance of this observation would be more strongly felt by an Hebrew convert, who was assailed with arguments respecting the obligations of the Mosaic law. But it is, in reality, no less important to us: for, if we do not trust in the blood of bulls and goats, we are ever ready to substitute something in the place of Jesus, as the ground of our confidence. But services, of whatever kind, whether ceremonial or moral, must be renounced in point of dependence. They must not even be blended in any degree with the atonement of Christ, as though the performance of *them* could procure us an interest in *this*. We must be “justified

“justified by his blood,” and by that *alone*. If St. Paul himself desired to be found in Christ, *not having his own righteousness*^c, much more must we. Let us remember then what, not the gospel only, but even the law itself, speaks to us on this subject; and let us look for a participation in the great sacrifice, not *for*, or *by* our works, but by faith only.]

2. We must forsake all worldly lusts, that we may walk with Christ

[What a perfect deadness to the world did Jesus manifest, when he went forth to the place of execution, giving up himself to that accursed death, from which he could have been so easily delivered! But the world had nothing that could fascinate him: its cares, its pleasures, its honours, its society were all alike indifferent to him: He had one only wish, to fulfil his Father's will, and finish the work he had been commissioned to perform. In turning his back on that devoted city, he felt no regret, except indeed for the blindness and hardness of the people's hearts. Thus must we come out of the world which lieth in wickedness: we must be “crucified to the world, and the world must be crucified to us^d.” “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” must be abandoned as objects of indifference, as objects of abhorrence. The things that are dearest to flesh and blood, if they stand at all in competition with Christ, are to be hated and forsaken. Our former companions, if they will not travel with us in the heavenly road, are to be left behind; for “what communion hath light with darkness, or a believer with an unbeliever? Wherefore, saith God, Come out from among them, and be separate^e.” Even father and mother, and wife and children, yea, and our own lives also, are to be of no account with us^f, if they interfere with our duty to God, or retard the execution of his commands.]

3. We must submit to all indignities, that we may resemble Christ

[This is the principal point to which the text refers. Jesus, when carrying his cross from the city to Mount Calvary, was an object of universal execration. Thus, in a measure must we also be, if we will be his disciples. The world will hate, revile, and persecute us, as soon as ever we become his faithful adherents. “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, so will they those of his household.” But we must not be deterred from our duty by these things: we must “follow our Lord without the camp, not only bearing his reproach,” but esteeming it our riches^g, and rejoicing that

we

^c Phil. iii. 9.

^d Gal. vi. 14.

^e 2 Cor. vi. 15, 17.

^f Luke xiv. 26.

^g Heb. xi. 26.

we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake^h. He has told us beforehand that "in the world we shall have tribulation," and that, in proof of our attachment to him, we must "take up our cross daily and follow him." Expecting this therefore, we must "count the cost;" that, if we be treated "as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things," we may, like him, "endure the cross and despise the shameⁱ." Nor should it ever seem hard to us to go in the path which he has trodden before us. On the contrary, to be conformed to him should be our highest ambition: "for if we suffer with him for a time, we shall reign also with him^k" in glory for evermore.]

^h Acts v. 41.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 2.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 12.

CXXXIV. THE MEAT-OFFERING A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Lev. ii. 13. *Every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.*

THERE certainly is need of much sobriety and caution in interpreting the typical parts of scripture, lest, instead of adhering to the path marked out for us by the inspired writers, we be found wandering in the regions of fancy and conjecture. But there are some types, which, notwithstanding they be soberly explained, appear at first sight the mere creatures of one's imagination; which, however, on a more full investigation, evidently appear to have been instituted of God for the express purpose of prefiguring the truths of the gospel. Of this kind is the ordinance now under our consideration: for the elucidating of which, we shall

I. State the various circumstances that were to be observed in the meat-offering

[Meat-offerings were annexed to many of the more solemn sacrifices, and constituted a part of them^a. But they were also frequently offered by themselves. They were to consist of fine flour, *mixed* with oil, and *accompanied* with frankincense^b. The quantity offered was at the option of the offerer,

^a Numb. xxviii. throughout.

^b Ver. 2, 5.

offerer, because it was a free-will offering. The wheat might be presented either simply dried and formed into flour, or baked as a cake, or fried as a wafer^c: but, in whatever way it was presented, it must by all means have salt upon it^d. It was on no account to have any mixture in it, either of honey, or of leaven^e. A part, or a memorial of it, was to be taken by the priest, (but with *all* the frankincense) and be burnt upon the altar^f: and the remainder was for the maintenance of the priest himself, as holy food^g. When it was duly offered in this manner, it was most pleasing and acceptable to God^h.]

Having briefly stated what this chapter contains respecting the meat-offering, we proceed to

II. Explain its typical import

The scriptures clearly represent the meat-offering as typical

1. Of Christ's sacrifice

[The meat-offering, or *mincha*, is often spoken of in direct reference to Christ, and his sacrifice. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have a long passage quoted from the Psalms, to shew that neither the meat-offering (*mincha*) nor any other sacrifice was to be presented to God, after that Christ should have fulfilled those types by his one offering of himself upon the crossⁱ. And it is of great importance in this view to remember, that though the meat-offering was for the most part eucharistical, or an expression of thankfulness, it was sometimes presented *as a sin-offering, to make an atonement for sin*: only, on those occasions, it was not mixed with oil, or accompanied with frankincense, because God could not smell a sweet savour from a sin-offering^k. This is a clear proof, that it must typify the sacrifice of Christ, who is the true, the only propitiation for sin^l.

Now there was a peculiar suitableness in this offering to represent the sacrifice of Christ. Was it of the finest quality, mixed with the purest oil, and free from any kind of leaven? this prefigured his holy nature, anointed, in a superabundant measure, with the oil of joy and gladness^m, and free from the smallest particle of sinⁿ. Its destruction by fire on the altar denoted the sufferings he was to endure upon the cross; while the consumption of the remainder by the priests, marked him out as the food of his people's souls, all of them being partakers

^c Ver. 4, 7, 14.

^d Ver. 13.

^e Ver. 11.

^f Ver. 16.

^g Ver. 3.

^h Ver. 9.

ⁱ Compare Ps. xl. 6—8, with Heb. x. 5—10.

^k Lev. v. 11, 13. See also 1 Sam. iii. 14.

^l 1 John ii. 2.

^m Ps. xlv. 7. John iii. 34.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 22.

partakers of the sacerdotal office, a kingdom of priests°. The frankincense also, which ascended in sweet odours, intimated the acceptableness of his sacrifice on our behalf.]

2. Of our services

[The services of Christians are also frequently mentioned in terms alluding to the mincha, or meat-offering. *Their alms* are spoken of as a sacrifice well pleasing to God^p, an odour of a sweet smell^q. *Their prayers* are said to be as the evening sacrifice, that was always accompanied with the meat-offering^r; and the Prophet Malachi, foretelling that, under the gospel, “all men,” Gentiles as well as Jews, “should pray every where^s,” uses this language; “I have no pleasure in you (Jews) saith the Lord, neither will I receive an offering (a mincha) at your hand: for from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering (mincha); for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts^t.” In a word, *the conversion of sinners, and their entire devoting of themselves to God*, is represented under this image: “They shall bring all your brethren, says the Prophet, for an offering (mincha) unto the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering (mincha) in a clean vessel unto the Lord^u.” And St. Paul speaks of himself, (in allusion to the flour mixed with oil) as ministering the gospel to the Gentiles, “that the offering up of the Gentiles, might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost^x.”

Nor is it without evident propriety that our services were prefigured by this ordinance. Was the flour to be of the best quality, and impregnated with oil? We must offer unto God, not our body only, but our soul; and *that* too, anointed with an holy unction^y. Was neither honey, nor leaven, to be mixed with it? Our services must be free from carnality^z, or hypocrisy^a. Was a part of it, together with *all* the frankincense, to be burnt upon the altar, and the remainder to be eaten as holy food? Thus must our services be inflamed with divine love, and be offered *wholly* to the glory of God; and, while they ascend up with acceptance before God, they shall surely tend also to the strengthening and refreshing of our own souls^b.]

There is yet one circumstance in the meat-offering,
which,

° Exod. xix. 6. with 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^p Heb. xiii. 16.

^q Phil. iv. 18.

^r Ps. cxli. 2. with Numb. xxviii. 4, 5.

^s 1 Tim. ii. 8.

^t Mal. i. 10, 11. ^u Isai. lxvi. 20.

^x Rom. xv. 16.

^y 1 Thess. v. 23. ^z 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^a If we are to annex any other idea than that of *leaven* to “honey,” that of carnality seems the most appropriate. Prov. xxv. 16, 27.

^b Luke xii. 1. 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

^c Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

which, for its importance, needs a distinct consideration ; which will lead us to

III. Notice the strict injunction respecting the seasoning of it with salt

It surely was not in vain, that the injunction respecting the use of salt *in this, and in every other offering*, was so solemnly *thrice* repeated in the space of one single verse. But not even that injunction should induce one to look for any peculiar mystery (at least, not publicly to attempt an explanation of the mystery) if the scriptures did not unfold to us its meaning, and give us a clue to the interpretation of it.

The whole ordinance being typical, we must consider this injunction

1. In reference to Christ's sacrifice

[Salt, in scripture, is used to denote *savouriness* and *perpetuity*. In the former sense, our Lord compares his people to good salt, while false professors are as "salt that has lost its savour^c." In the latter sense, God's covenant is often called "a covenant of salt^d." Apply then these ideas to the sacrifice of Christ, and the reason of this reiterated injunction will immediately appear.

How savoury to God, and how sweet to man, is the atonement, which Christ has offered! In the view of its acceptableness to God, and *in direct reference to the meat-offering*, it is thus noticed by St. Paul; "He gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour^e." And, as having laid, by his own death, the foundation of his spiritual temple, he is said to be "*precious unto them that believe*^f."

Moreover the efficacy of his atonement is as immutable as God himself. In this, as well as in every other respect, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^g." The virtue of his blood to cleanse from sin, was not more powerful in the day that it purified three thousand converts, than it is at this hour, and shall be to all who trust in it^h.]

2. In reference to our services

[Let the ideas of savouriness and perpetuity be transferred to these also, and it will appear that this exposition is not dictated by fancy, but by the scriptures themselves.

A mere formal service, destitute of life and power, may be justly spoken of in the same humiliating terms as a false professor, "It is not fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghillⁱ."

Hence

^c Matt. v. 13.

^e Eph. v. 2.

^h 1 John i. 7.

^d Numb. xviii. 19. and 2 Chron. xiii. 5.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 7.

^g Heb xiii. 8.

ⁱ Luke xiv. 34, 35.

Hence our Lord says, *in reference to the very injunction before us*, "Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost its saltiness, wherewith will you season it? HAVE SALT WITHIN YOURSELVES^k." What can this mean, but that there should be a life and power in all our services, an heavenliness and spirituality in our whole deportment? We should have in ourselves^l, and present to God^m, and diffuse on all around usⁿ, a "*savour of the knowledge of Christ.*"

Nor is the continuance, or perpetuity of our services less strongly marked: for in addition to the remarkable expressions of our Lord before cited^o, St. Paul directs, that our "Speech be *ALWAY* with grace, *seasoned with salt*^p." There never ought to be one hour's intermission to the divine life, not one moment when we have lost the savour and relish of divine things.]

In order to a due IMPROVEMENT of this subject, let us reduce it to practice

1. Let us take of Christ's sacrifice, and both present it to God, and feed upon it in our souls

[All the Lord's people are "*kings and priests unto God*:" all therefore have a right to present to him this offering, and to feed upon it: both of these things may be done by faith; and both *must* be done by us, if ever we would find acceptance with God. Let us think what would have been the state of the Jewish priests, if they had declined the execution of their office? Let us then put ourselves into their situation, and rest assured, that a neglect of this duty will bring upon us God's heavy and eternal displeasure^r. On the other hand, if we believe in Christ, and feed on his body and blood, we shall be monuments of his love and mercy for evermore^s.]

2. Let us devote ourselves to God in the constant exercise of all holy affections

[All we have is from the Lord; and all must be dedicated to his service. But let us be sure that, with our outward services, we give him our hearts^t. What if a man, having good corn and oil, had offered that which was damaged? Should it have been accepted^u? Or, if he had neglected to add the salt, should it have had any savour in God's estimation? So neither will the form of godliness be of any value without the power^x; but, if we present ourselves^y, or any *spiritual* sacrifice whatever, it shall be accepted of God through Christ^z, to our present and eternal comfort.]

^k Mark ix. 49, 50.

^l 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^m Rev. i. 6.

ⁿ Prov. xxiii. 26.

^o Rom. xii. 1.

^p Matt. xvi. 23.

^q Note ^k.

^r John vi. 53.

^s Mal. i. 8.

^t 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^u 2 Cor. ii. 15.

^v Col. iv. 6.

^w Ib. ver. 54.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 5.

CXXXV. THE TRESPASS-OFFERING A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Lev. v. 17—19. *If a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass-offering unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred, and wist it not; and it shall be forgiven him. It is a trespass-offering: he hath certainly trespassed against the Lord.*

THE ceremonial law was intended to lead men to Christ, and was calculated to do so in a variety of ways. It exhibited Christ in all his work and offices, and directed every sinner to look to him. Moreover, the multitude of its rites and ceremonies had a tendency to break the spirits of the Lord's people, and to make them anxiously look for that period, when they should be liberated from a yoke which they were not able to bear, and render unto God a more liberal and spiritual service. It is in this latter view more especially that we are led to consider the trespass-offering, which was to be presented to God for the smallest error in the observation of any one ordinance, however ignorantly or unintentionally it might be committed. In order to elucidate the nature and intent of the trespass-offering, we shall

I. Shew the evil, and the remedy of sins of ignorance

It is often said that the intention constitutes the criminality of an action. But this principle is not true to the extent that is generally supposed.

It is certain that ignorance *extenuates* the guilt of an action

[Our Lord himself virtually acknowledged this, when he declared that the opportunities of information which he had afforded the Jews, greatly enhanced the guilt of those who rejected him^a. And he even urged the ignorance of his murderers as a plea with his heavenly Father to forgive them; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"^b.] St. Peter palliated their crime upon the very same principles, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers^c." And St. Paul speaks of himself as obtaining mercy *because*

^a John ix. 41. and xv. 22.^b Luke xxiii. 34.^c Acts iii. 17.

because what he had done was done ignorantly and in unbelief^d: whereas if he had done it, knowing whom he persecuted, he would most probably never have obtained mercy.]

But it is equally certain that ignorance cannot *excuse* us in the sight of God

[A man is not blameless who unwittingly violates the laws of the land: he is obnoxious to a penalty, though from the consideration of his ignorance that penalty may be mitigated. Nor does any man consider ignorance as a sufficient plea for his servant's faults, if that servant had the means of knowing his master's will: he rather blames that servant for negligence and disrespect in not shewing greater solicitude to ascertain and perform his duty.]

With respect to God, the passage before us shews in the strongest light that even the slightest error, even in the observance of a mere arbitrary institution, however unintentionally committed, could not be deemed innocent: on the contrary, it is said, "He shall bring his offering; he *hath certainly trespassed against the Lord.*" Much more therefore must every violation of the *moral* law be attended with guilt, because there is an inherent malignity in every transgression of the moral law; and because man's ignorance of his duty, as well as his aversion to duty, is a fruit and consequence of the first transgression. Hence is there an eternal curse denounced against *every* one that *continueth* not in *all* things that are written in the book of the law to *do* them^e.

It is yet further evident that ignorance is no excuse before God, because St. Paul calls himself a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor, yea, the very chief of sinners, for persecuting the church, notwithstanding he thought he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus^f. And God declares that men perish for lack of knowledge^g, and that, *because* they are of no understanding, he will therefore shew them no favour^h.]

The only remedy for sins, how light soever they may appear to us, is the atonement of Christ

[The high priest was appointed particularly to offer for the *errors* of the peopleⁱ. And as soon as ever an error, or unintentional transgression, was discovered, the person guilty of it was to bring his offering^k, and to seek for mercy through the blood of atonement. There was indeed a distinction in the

^d 1 Tim. i. 13.

^e Gal. iii. 10.

^f Acts xxvi. 9. with 1 Tim. i. 15.

^g Hos. iv. 6.

^h Isai. xxvii. 11.

ⁱ Heb. ix. 7. with Ezek. xlv. 19, 20.

^k The offering was to be of proper value according to the priest's "estimation." Lev. xxvii. 2-8.

the offerings which different persons were to bring; which distinction was intended to shew that the *degrees*, of criminality, attaching to the errors of different people, varied in proportion as the offenders enjoyed the means of information.

If a priest erred, he must bring a bullock for an offering¹; if a ruler erred, he must offer a male kid^m; if one of the common people erred, he must bring a *female* kid, or a *female* lambⁿ, or, if he could not afford that, he might bring two young pigeons^o. And, to mark yet further the superior criminality of the priest, his offering was to be *wholly* burnt, and its blood *was to be sprinkled* seven times before the vail of the sanctuary, and to be put upon the horns of *the altar of incense*; whereas the offerings of the others were to be *only in part* consumed by fire; and their blood *was not to be sprinkled* at all before the vail, and to be put only on the horns of *the altar of burnt-offering*^p. Further still, if a person were so poor as not to be able to afford two young pigeons, he might be supposed to have still less opportunities of information, and was therefore permitted to bring only an ephah of fine flour; part of which, however, was to be burnt upon the altar, to shew the offerer what a destruction he himself had merited^q. And *this is the excepted case* to which the apostle alludes, when he says, with his wonted accuracy, that "*almost* all things are by the law purged with blood^r."

But, under the gospel, there is no distinction whatever to be made. We must now say, *without any single exception*, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission." We need Christ as much to bear the iniquity of our holy things, as to purge our foulest transgressions^s: there is no other fountain opened for sin^t, no other way to the Father^u, no other door of hope^x, no other name whereby we can be saved^y. Christ is "*the Ram*^z," "*caught in the thicket*^a," if we may so speak, who must be our substitute and surety, whether our guilt be extenuated by ignorance, or aggravated by presumption.]

This point being clear, we proceed to

II. Suggest such reflections as naturally arise from the subject

A more instructive subject than this cannot easily be proposed to us. It leads us naturally to observe

1. What a tremendous load of guilt is there on the soul of every man!

[Let

¹ Lev. iv. 3.

^m Ib. 22, 23.

ⁿ Ib. 27, 28, 32.

^o Ib. v. 7.

^p Lev. iv. 6, 7, 12. comp. with ib. 25, 26, 30, 31.

^q Ib. v. 12.

^r Heb. ix. 22.

^s Exod. xxviii. 38.

^t Zech. xiii. 1.

^u John xiv. 6.

^x John x. 9.

^y Acts iv. 12.

^z See the text.

^a Alluding to Gen. xxii. 13-

[Let but the sins, *which we can remember*, be reckoned up, and they will be more than the hairs of our head. Let those be added, *which we observed* at the time, but *have now forgotten*, and O, how awfully will their numbers be increased ! But let all the trespasses, which we have committed through ignorance, be put to the account ; all the smallest deviations and defects which the penetrating eye of God has seen, (all of which he has noted in the book of his remembrance) and surely we shall feel the force of that question that was put to Job, “ Is not thy wickedness great ? are not thine iniquities infinite ^b ? ” If we bring every thing to the touchstone of God’s law, we shall see, that “ there is not a just man upon earth who liveth and sinneth not ^c : ” and that “ in many things we all offend ^d ; ” so that there is but too much reason for every one of us to exclaim with the Psalmist, “ Who can understand his *errors* ? O cleanse thou me from my secret faults ^e ! ” Let none of us then extenuate our guilt, or think it sufficient to say, “ It was an error ^f : ” but let us rather humble ourselves as altogether filthy and abominable ^g, as a mass of corruption ^h, a living body of sin ⁱ.]

2. How awful must be the state of those who live in *presumptuous* sins !

[The evil of sins committed ignorantly, and without design, is so great, that it cannot be expiated but by the blood of atonement : what then shall we say of *presumptuous* sins ? how heinous must *they* be ! Let us attend to the voice of God, who has himself compared the guilt contracted by unintentional, and by presumptuous sin ; and who declares that, though provision was made under the law for the forgiveness of the former, there was no remedy whatever for the latter : the offender was to be put to death, and to be consigned over to endless perdition ^k. Let none then think it a light matter to violate the dictates of conscience, and the commands of God ; for, in so doing, they pour contempt upon God’s law, yea, and upon God himself also ^l : and the time is quickly coming, when God shall repay them to their face ^m ; and shall beat them, not like the ignorant offender, with few stripes, but, as the wilful delinquent, with many stripes ⁿ. Let this consideration make us cry to God in those words of the Psalmist, “ Keep thy servant from presumptuous sins ; let them not have dominion over me ; so shall I be undefiled and innocent from the great offence ^o. ”]

3. How

^b Job xxii. 5. ^c Eccl. vii. 20.

^e Ps. xix. 12. ^f Eccl. v. 6.

^h Rom. vii. 18. Isai. i. 5, 6.

^k Numb. xv. 27—31. ^l Ibid.

^m Luke xii. 48.

^d Jam. iii. 2. Prov. xxiv. 16.

^g Ps. xiv. 3.

ⁱ Rom. vii. 14, 24.

ⁿ Deut. vii. 10. Eccl. xi. 9.

^o Ps. xix. 13.

3. How desperate is the condition of those who make light of Christ's atonement !

[Under the law, there was no remission even of the smallest error, but through the blood of atonement. Nor can any sin whatever be pardoned, under the gospel dispensation, but through the sacrifice of Christ. Yet, when we speak of Christ as the only remedy for sin, and urge the necessity of believing in him for justification, many are ready to object, Why does he talk so much of justification by faith? But the answer is plain : " You are sinners before God ; and your one great concern should be to know how your sins may be forgiven : now God has provided a way, and only one way, of forgiveness ; and *that* is, through the atonement of Christ : therefore we set forth Christ as the one remedy for sin ; and exhort you continually to believe in him." The true scope then of such objections is, to rob Christ of his glory, and your own souls of salvation. Remember this, and be thankful, that the atonement is so much insisted on, so continually set before you. Pour not contempt upon it : for, if they who despised Moses' law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith *he* was sanctified, an unholy thing ^p? Yes, to such wilful transgressors, " there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume them ^q."]]

4. How wonderful must be the efficacy of the blood of Christ

[Let only *one* man's sins be set forth, and they will be found numberless as the sands upon the sea shore : yet the blood of Christ can cleanse, not him only, but a whole world of sinners, yea, all who have ever existed these six thousand years, or shall ever exist to the very end of time : moreover, his one offering can cleanse them, not merely from sins of ignorance, but even from presumptuous sins, for which no remedy was appointed by the law of Moses^r. What a view does this give us of the death of Christ ! O that we could realize it in our minds, just as the offender under the law realized the substitution of the animal which he presented to the priest to be offered in his stead ! Then should we have a just apprehension of his dignity, and a becoming sense of his love. Let us then carry to him our crimson sins^s, not doubting but that they shall all be purged away^t ; and we may rest assured that, in a little time, we shall join the heavenly choir in singing, " Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever ^u."]]

^p Heb. x. 28, 29.

^q Ib. 26, 27.

^r Acts xiii. 39.

^s Isai. i. 18.

^t 1 John i. 7.

^u Rev. i. 5, 6.

CXXXVI. THE SCAPE-GOAT A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Lev. xvi. 21, 22. *And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities, unto a land not inhabited.*

OF all the types, under the Mosaic dispensation, there was not one more plain in its import, or more useful in its tendency, than that before us. Most other types receive light from their accomplishment in Christ; this reflects light on the gospel itself. The high-priest, having before offered a bullock and a ram, was to take two goats; and, having determined by lot which of them should be killed, and which be kept alive, was to kill the one, and to sprinkle its blood, with the blood of the bullock, within the sanctuary, and then to present the other before the Lord in the manner described in the text: he was to confess over it the sins of the people, and, by putting his hands upon its head, to transfer to it the people's sins; and then to send it into the wilderness that it might never more be seen of men. This ceremony pointed out to them the true and proper *object* of faith, the *operation* of it on the believer's mind, and the *fruit and benefit* of it to his soul.

I. The true and proper object of faith

[When the high priest put his hands on the head of the scape-goat, the eyes of all present must of necessity be turned towards that devoted creature. They indeed who were endowed with a spiritual discernment, would look through the type unto Christ the great Antitype: but still the goat would be regarded by all as the immediate instrument used by God for the removal of their sins: their faith terminated on *that* as the instituted means of their deliverance.

Thus is Christ the one object to whom the eyes of all must be directed. He has been *chosen of God* from all eternity to bear in his own person, and to take away from his people, all their sins^a. In due time he was *exhibited to the world* in this very character^b: the iniquities of all mankind were *laid upon him*^c: and his command to every living creature is, Look unto *Me* and be ye saved^d.

There

^a Rev. xiii. 8.

^b Rom. iii. 25. See also John i. 29. 2 Cor. v. 21.

^c Isai. liii. 6.

^d Isai. xlv. 22.

There was indeed under the law another goat, whose blood was shed for the remission of their sins; which was therefore to be considered by them as a joint object of their faith. But the two together were, in fact, but one sacrifice, the one representing the death of Jesus, and the other his resurrection. While therefore we view Christ as dying for our offences, we must also, in conformity with the type before us, regard him as rising again for our justification^e.]

II. Its operation on the believer's mind

[The high priest confessed over the scape-goat the sins of all Israel with their several aggravations, at the very time that he transferred them to him by the imposition of his hands. By this significant ordinance he clearly shewed how faith always operates. It leads us in the first place to transfer all our guilt to the sacred head of Jesus. While we see the impossibility of removing our sins in any other way, faith will incline us to avail ourselves of that inestimable privilege of carrying them to the Saviour, and thereby securing to ourselves an everlasting deliverance from them. But will it therefore cause us to think lightly of our iniquities, because they may be cancelled by such means? No: it will rather make them to appear exceeding sinful; and will dispose us to humble ourselves for them in dust and ashes. A true believer will not so much as desire pardon without being made to feel the evil and bitterness of sin: and the more sincerely he looks to Christ, the more unfeignedly will he bewail his manifold transgressions^f. While, with Mary, he boldly confesses Christ, with her he will kiss his feet, and wash them with his tears^g.]

III. The fruit and benefit of it to his soul

[No sooner was the ordinance before us duly performed, than the sins of all Israel were taken away, and God was reconciled to his offending people. This indeed being only a typical institution, the pardon obtained by means of it was neither perfect nor durable, except to them who looked through the type to Christ himself. But faith in Christ, whether exercised by them or us, will obtain a full and everlasting remission of all our sins. Under the law indeed, there were some sins for which no sacrifice was appointed, and which therefore could not be purged away by any ceremonial oblations whatever. But there is no sin from which we shall not be justified by faith in Jesus^h. From the very instant that we are enabled to lay them upon his head, they shall be carried into the land of oblivion, and never more be remembered against usⁱ: yea, they shall be cast into the very depths of the

^e Rom. iv. 25.

^f Ezek. xvi. 63.

^g Luke vii. 37, 38.

^h Acts xiii. 39.

ⁱ Isai. xlii. 25. Heb. viii. 12.

the sea^k, and be put away from us far as the east is from the west^l.]

From hence we may LEARN

1. The different offices of repentance and faith

[Repentance can never make atonement for sin. However penitent we be, we must lay our hands upon the head of the scape-goat, and transfer our guilt to him. On the other hand, faith does not supersede repentance, but rather encourages and invites us to it. We must repent, in order to prepare our hearts for a grateful acceptance of pardon, and a diligent improvement of it in our future life: but we must believe in order to obtain pardon; *that* being bestowed solely on account of Christ's vicarious sacrifice. Repentance stirs us up to exercise faith on Christ; and faith stimulates us to further acts of penitence, for the honouring of the law, the justifying of God, the exalting of Christ, the purifying of the heart, the adorning of our profession, and the rendering of us meet for glory. To be in a state pleasing to God, we must be believing penitents, and penitent believers.]

2. The folly of delaying to repent and believe

[Impenitence and unbelief keep us from Christ, and rivet our sins upon us. We must all resemble either the oblation, or the offerer: we must either, like the goats, die under the wrath of God, and be for ever banished, as accursed creatures, from his presence; or we must go with penitence and contrition to our living Surety, and cast our iniquities on him. And can there be a doubt which state we should prefer? Or would we continue another hour under the guilt of all our sins, when there is such a way provided for the removal of them? Let us then behold the Scape-goat, as in our immediate presence, and go instantly to lay our sins on him. It cannot, as under the law, be done by the priest for us; it must be done by every one of us for himself. Let us then go to him with penitence and faith, and rest assured that we shall not repent or believe in vain.]

^k Mic. vii. 19.

^l Ps. ciii. 12.

CXXXVII. CHRIST THE LAMB OF GOD.

John i. 29. *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

IN the general estimation of the world, they are reputed great who bear sway over their fellow-creatures, and are surrounded with pomp and splendor. But with God men are accounted great according as they possess a
knowledge

knowledge of his ways, and advance the ends of his government. Hence we are told by our Lord himself that John the Baptist, a plain rustic man, clothed with coarse raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle, and subsisting on the spontaneous produce of the wilderness, was the greatest of all men that had ever been born. And what was it that so exalted him, not only above all the monarchs of the mightiest empires, but above Abraham, or Moses, or David, or any other of the prophets? It was *this*: they had seen Christ only at a distance, and spoken of him only in dark prophecies; but *he* beheld him personally; and, having discovered him by an infallible sign from heaven, pointed him out to others as that very Lamb of God, who should take away the sin of the world. Through the goodness of God, we may be as much exalted above him, as he was above others, if we behold Jesus in the character which is here assigned him; because the completion of his sacrificial work, together with the more perfect revelation of it, which we have in the New Testament, enables us to enter far more deeply into the mystery of redemption, and more fully to comply with the ends and designs of God in it^a. To forward therefore your truest advancement, we shall

I. Illustrate the character of our Lord as it is here described

[Under the law, there were lambs offered every morning and evening in sacrifice to God; and it is to these, and not to the Paschal Lamb, that St. John refers. They were to be of the first year, and without blemish^b: and by the continual offering up of them God was pacified, as it were, so that his wrath did not break forth to destroy his people on account of their daily transgressions. Such a lamb was Christ: he was *the* Lamb, whom all the others typified. He was truly without spot or blemish^c; and was offered on the altar of his cross, not merely *for the good*, but *in the stead*, of sinners^d. He was really a propitiatory sacrifice, inasmuch as he bore in his own body the curse due to sin^e, and expiated all its guilt. As there was no variation of the daily sacrifices, but only a repetition of the same, so his one offering of himself is the sole cause of our acceptance with God: nor need that to be repeated, because the virtue of it extends from the beginning to the

^a Matt. xi. 11.

^b Exod. xxix. 38—41. Numb. xxviii. 3—8.

^c 1 Pet. i. 19.

^d 1 Pet. iii. 18. Gal. iii. 13. • 1 Pet. ii. 24.

the end of time; "he is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world^f." Nor is it the sin of one nation only that he takes away, but the sin of the whole world^g. He was eminently the Lamb of God, having been chosen to that office by God, and being accepted by him on our behalf in the discharge of it: He was "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour^h."]

II. Call more particularly your attention to him

1. Let the careless sinner "behold" him

[It is but too evident that they, who live in the neglect of God and their own souls, know little of the evil and malignity of sin. But let such persons view the Son of God leaving the bosom of his Father, and assuming our nature to atone for sin: let them go to Gethsemane and behold him bathed in a bloody sweat through the agonies of his soul: let them follow him to Calvary, and hear him crying in the depths of dereliction, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Let them view him expiring under the curse and condemnation of the law; and then let them judge, whether sin be so light and venial an evil as they imagine? Let them bethink themselves, "if such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dryⁱ?" Let them behold him, whom they have pierced, yea, whom they are daily crucifying afresh, and mourn^k. Let them know that what he suffered was for them; and that, if they be only willing to humble themselves for their iniquities, the benefits of his death shall extend to them. O that we might all so behold him, as to experience the efficacy of his blood in the removal of our sins!]

2. Let the self-righteous moralist "behold" him

[How strange is it that any one, who bears the name of Christ, should expect salvation by the works of the law! Why should that Lamb of God have come down from heaven to expiate our guilt, if sin could have been taken away by means of any repentance or righteousness of ours? What truth could there be in the Baptist's assertion, if pardon were to be obtained in any other way than through the sacrifice of Christ? Yea, for what end could so many thousands of lambs have bled upon the altar, but to shew, that "without shedding of blood there could be no remission^l;" and consequently, to lead the attention of all to that Lamb of God, that should in due time be offered on the cross? Let such indignity then be no longer shewn to the Saviour of the world: but, as it is his office to take away our sin, let us renounce all self-righteous hopes, and trust entirely in his all-atoning sacrifice.]

3. Let

^f Rev. xiii. 8.

^g 1 John ii. 2.

^h Eph. v. 2.

ⁱ Luke xxiii. 31.

^k Zech. xii. 10.

^l Heb. ix. 22.

3. Let the mourning penitent “behold” him

[No sight under heaven can be so welcome to a contrite soul as a sight of Jesus dying in the place of sinners : for, can we suppose, that he was appointed of God to make atonement for us, and that he executed his commission by dying on the cross, and that, after all, he is unable or unwilling to take away our sin? Was he designed to be a “propitiation for the sins of the whole world,” and is there such malignity in the sins of any individual, that there is not a sufficiency in his blood to atone for them? Let us put away such disparaging thoughts of this Lamb of God: let us view him as infinite both in power and grace: let us listen to his encouraging invitation, “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth^m:” and let us, whatever be our state, trust in him, as “able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.”]

4. Let the professor of godliness “behold” him

[Well may you rejoice in the sufficiency of your Saviour’s merits; well may you glory in the security which his blood affords you. But remember, it is not the guilt of sin only that he removes, but the power of it also: and the experience of the latter is our only evidence that we have experienced the former. “To redeem us from the love and practice of iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works,” was no less the intent of his death, than to deliver us from condemnationⁿ. While therefore we behold the Lamb of God as the ground of our hope, let us also behold him as a pattern for our imitation^o. Let us follow his steps in all meekness and patience, in all purity and holiness: and let us convince the world that faith in Christ, so far from relaxing our zeal for good works, is the strongest incentive to the performance of them.]

^m Isai. xlv. 22.ⁿ Tit. ii. 14.^o 1 Pet. ii. 24.

• Ib. ver. 21.

CXXXVIII. REDEMPTION FROM A VAIN CONVERSATION.

1 Pet. i. 18, 19. *Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish, and without spot.*

THE Christian’s duty is by no means easy to be performed. It requires the exercise of much firmness and self-

self-denial. The inspired writers, aware of this, enforce it by every consideration that can influence our minds. In the passage before us the apostle is recommending an holy fear and jealousy lest we should be drawn back into the love of this present world. He first urges this duty from a regard to the impartial tribunal of God^a, and then from the very intent of Christ's death. This latter and most powerful argument calls for our attention at this time. To illustrate it we shall consider

I. The extent of man's redemption

The "conversation" of men in all ages and in all places has been the same

[Different customs indeed have obtained in different countries: but all have walked after the imagination of their own hearts: they have prohibited such things as they thought injurious to the welfare of society, but left themselves at liberty to consult their own inclinations in every thing else. Their practices in time formed a kind of law. What was sanctioned by one generation was followed by another. And the "conversation received by tradition from their fathers" was that which was adopted by every succeeding age.]

It is almost superfluous to observe that such conversation has been "vain"

[Let any one ask himself what has his past conversation profited him? *Has it given him any solid satisfaction?* No: the remembrance of it cannot at all assuage the anguish of a mind bowed down with affliction, much less of a mind burthened with a sense of guilt. *Has it brought honour to God, or any real benefit to mankind?* It has been the means of almost shutting out the knowledge of God from the world; but has never honoured him in any single instance: and as for mankind, if it have in any respect advanced their temporal interests, it has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and encouraged them to walk in the broad way that leadeth to destruction.]

From this however the true Christian has been redeemed

[It is not only from hell that the Christian is delivered, but from sin. He once indeed "walked according to the course of this world (which is the Devil's course^b) fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind even as others:" but now he has seen the vanity of such a life: he proposes to himself

^a Ver. 17.

^b Eph. ii. 2, 3.

himself another pattern, even Jesus, "who hath set us an example, that we should follow his steps:" he is no longer "conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of his mind." By the cross of Christ the world is become loathsome to him, even as a crucified object: while he is in it indeed, he performs the duties of it in a conscientious manner: but he goes into it only, as a physician into an hospital, from a sense of duty, and for the good of others; and is glad enough to retire from it to a purer atmosphere.]

He endeavours to keep before his eyes

II. The price paid for him

Slaves and captives are redeemed with silver and gold: but gold was of no value in the redemption of our souls

[The whole world was not a sufficient price for one soul: it could not atone for our sin or reconcile an offended God: nor could it at all avail to change our carnal dispositions. Gold and silver might rivet our chains, and fix us more strongly in a vain conversation; but it could never detach us from the love of present things.]

That, which alone was of value sufficient, was, "the precious blood of Christ"

[The lamb that was offered daily in sacrifice to God was to be spotless and without blemish. By its blood, atonement was made for the sins of the Jewish nation; and they were preserved a holy and peculiar people. This was a typical ordinance: it represented Christ, who in due time "offered himself without spot to God:" and the benefits visibly, and in a figure, enjoyed by the Jewish nation, are invisibly, but really enjoyed by us. We have the substance of which they had the shadow. Well then might the apostle call his blood "precious." There is no bondage from which it does not deliver us. Were we under the curse and condemnation of the law? The blood of Christ redeems us from the penalty of all our transgressions: it gives peace to the guilty, and liberty to the captive soul: it frees, moreover, from all the snares and entanglements of this vain world. This is mentioned both in the text and in other places as a principal end of Christ's death^d. Precious indeed is it, when its influence is thus felt. To a true Christian the blood of Christ is not less precious as delivering him from sin, than it is as delivering him from hell itself.]

While

^c Gal. vi. 14.

^d Gal. i. 4.

While we wonder that such a price was ever paid, let us enquire into

III. The effect which the consideration of this price should have upon us

The apostle introduces the text as an argument for passing our time in fear

[A *slavish* fear is one of those things from which we are delivered by the blood of Christ. We sprinkle that blood on our door-posts, and have no dread of the destroying angel. But there is an holy jealousy, which it is our duty ever to maintain. We are only sojourners in this world, and are hastening to our Father's house. We are moreover in danger of being diverted from our path. We have a subtle adversary and a deceitful heart. Sin itself also is deceitful, and will beguile us, if we watch not against its wiles. We should therefore be on our guard, and pass the time of our sojourning here in fear.]

And well may this effect be produced by such a wonderful consideration

[Were we laden with bags of gold, we should be cautious how we ventured ourselves among thieves and robbers. And shall we be careless when we carry about with us what is of more value than the whole world? Shall we trifle with that which nothing but the precious blood of God's own Son could redeem? Shall Satan as a roaring lion go about seeking to devour us, and we not stand on our guard against him? Shall we suffer him to "destroy that for which Christ died?" O let not that precious blood be so vile in our eyes. Let not our souls appear of so little value. Let us rather watch night and day. It is but a little time: soon we shall be at home; safe in the bosom of our Lord, safe beyond the reach of harm.]

APPLICATION

1. Let us enquire, what we "*know*" concerning these things

[The apostle takes for granted that all Christians "*know*" them. But do ye *know* them? Do ye know that a worldly conversation is a vain conversation? Do ye know that no resolutions, no services, yea, nothing but the precious blood of Christ could ever redeem you from it? And do ye know by daily experience the efficacy of his blood in that view? "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith," and whether you have that deadness to the world, which alone can warrant a favourable conclusion. If ye be Christ's, "ye are not of the

world, even as he was not of the world^e:" "ye are dead to it," and "have your conversation in heaven^f."]

2. Let us labour to experience them more and more

[There is something very fascinating in the temptations of the world. Its pleasures, riches, or honours are but too apt to draw us aside. But whenever ye are tempted, say, Shall I return to that bondage from which I have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ? Shall I trample under foot the Son of God, and crucify him afresh^g? Shall I, as it were, see his dead corpse lying in my way, and go over *that* to the gratification of my base desires? Surely such reflections will not fail to animate your resolution, and to keep you at a distance from those scenes of vanity, where your stedfastness would be endangered. Let us live as citizens of a better country, and "no more fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance^h." Let us drink of purer pleasures, even of "that river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." Thus, experiencing the *full* benefits of redeeming love on earth, we shall ere long sing its praises in heaven for evermore.]

^e John xvii. 16.

^f Phil. iii. 20.

^g Heb. x. 29.

^h 1 Pet. i. 14.

CXXXIX. THE MEANS OF DELIVERANCE FROM SPIRITUAL LEPROSY.

Ps. li. 7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

EVERY part of God's word is profitable for our instruction in righteousness—

But, in the Psalms, religion is exemplified, and, as it were, embodied—

The workings of genuine repentance are admirably delineated in that before us—

David traces his iniquities to their proper source, his original corruption—

He acknowledges the necessity of a thorough renovation of soul—

And, in legal terms, but of evangelical import, he implores forgiveness—

The expressions in the text intimate to us

I. The nature of sin

The

The generality of the world imagine sin to be a light and venial evil—

Some indeed have learned to dread it *as destructive* of their eternal happiness—

But very few have any idea of it *as defiling and debasing* to the soul

It is in this view, however, that we are now called to consider it

[Sin has defiled every member of our body and every faculty of our soul—

Hence St. Paul speaks of it as “filthiness both of the flesh and spirit^a.”

What uncircumcised ears^b, what venomous tongues^c, what adulterous eyes^d, have the greater part of mankind^e!—

How are all their members used as instruments of unrighteousness^f!—

What pride, and envy, what wrath, and malice, are harboured in the bosom!—

How gladly would we cast off all allegiance to God, and be a god to ourselves^g!—

Thus, in *fleshly* lusts, we degrade ourselves almost to a level with the beasts^h—

And, in *spiritual* filthiness, we too much resemble the fallen angelsⁱ—

How different is this state from that in which we were first created^k!—

Yet is the change effected solely by the agency of sin^l—]

In this view, more especially, is sin represented in the text

[The Psalmist evidently refers to the state of a leper, or a leprous house—

No disorder was more loathsome than the leprosy^m—

A person infected with it was driven from the society of his dearest relatives—

And was necessitated to proclaim his uncleanness to all who approached himⁿ—

Nor could his disorder ever be cured by the art of man—

If he were ever healed, it was by God alone, without the intervention of human means—

Hence David, knowing the filthiness and incurableness of sin, cries to God—]

Similar

^a 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^e Ps. xii. 4.

^k Gen. i. 27.

ⁿ Lev. xiii. 44—46.

^b Acts vii. 51.

^c See Rom. iii. 10—19.

^h 2 Pet. ii. 22.

ⁱ Rom. v. 12.

^c Jam. iii. 6.

^f Rom. vi. 13.

^l John viii. 44.

^m Lev. xiii. 8.

Similar representations also abound in every part of the sacred writings

[Our *natural* depravity is declared in expressions of the like import^o—

Our *acquired* corruptions are said to render us loathsome objects^p—

The very *remains of sin* in the holiest of men are also described in similar terms^q—

Yea, the most eminent saints, in bewailing their sinfulness, have used the very same figure as David in the text^r—

Happy would it be for us, if we had these views of sin—

We should soon put away our proud, self-exalting thoughts—

And should adopt the confessions of holy Job^s—]

But, vile as sin is, it may be both forgiven and subdued
II. The means of deliverance from it

It has been already observed, that David alludes to the case of a leper—

This is manifest from the terms, wherein he implores deliverance

Under Jewish figures he sets forth the only means of salvation

[Certain means were prescribed by God for the purification of a *leper*^t—

When God had healed him, “the priest was to take two clean birds, with cedar-wood, scarlet, and hyssop”—

Having killed one of the birds, the priest was to “dip the hyssop and the live bird in the blood of the bird that had been slain”—

He was then to “sprinkle the leper seven times, and to let loose the living bird”—

This ordinance typified the death of Christ, with his resurrection, and subsequent *ascension into heaven with his own blood*^u—

A similar ordinance is explained by the apostle in this very manner^x—

And the same effect is plainly ascribed to the things here typified^y—

It is therefore in reference to Christ, that David says, “Purge me with hyssop”—

In

^o Job xv. 14—16. ^p Prov. xiii. 5. ^q Rom. vii. 24. The allusion seems to be to a dead body, which was sometimes fastened to criminals, till they died of the stench arising from it. In such a light did St. Paul view the remains of sin which he felt within him.

^r Isai. vi. 5.

^s Job ix. 20, 21, 30, 31.

^t Lev. xiv. 2—7.

^u Heb. ix. 12.

^x Ib. ver. 13, 14.

^y Rom. iv. 25.

In the purification of a *leprous house*, water was used with the blood^z—

This further typified the renewing influences of the Spirit of Christ—

And David seems to allude to it, when he adds “Wash me,” &c.—

Nor is this by any means a forced or fanciful distinction—

An inspired writer lays peculiar stress upon it^a—

And every enlightened person sees as much need of Christ’s Spirit to wash him from the defilement of sin, as of his blood to purge him from its guilt—]

The efficacy ascribed to these means is not at all exaggerated

[There is no sin whatever which the blood of Christ cannot cleanse—

We cannot conceive more enormous transgressions than those of David—

Yet even *he* could say with confidence, “Purge me, &c. and I shall be clean”—

Purified in this way, his soul would become “whiter than snow”—

This blessed truth is attested by the beloved apostle^b—

And it is urged by God himself as an inducement to repentance^c—

Our renewal indeed by the Holy Spirit is not perfect in this life—

But it shall be continually progressive towards perfection^d—

And, when the leprous tabernacle shall be taken down, it shall be reared anew in consummate purity and beauty^e—]

INFER

1. How mistaken are they, who seek salvation by any righteousness of their own!

[We can no more eradicate sin from our souls, than a leprosy from our bodies—

No man ever more deeply bewailed his sin, or more thoroughly turned from it, than David^f—

Yet he did not say, “Purge me with *my tears*, *my repentances*, or *my duties*, but, purge me *with hyssop*, and I shall be clean”—

He would make mention of no righteousness but that of Christ^g—

Nor would St. Paul himself trust for a moment in any other^h—

Shall

^z Lev. xiv. 48—53.

^a 1 John v. 6.

^b 1 John i. 7.

^c Isai. i. 18.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 16.

^e 2 Cor. v. 1.

Phil. iii. 21.

^f Ps. vi. 6. and xxxviii. 4—6.

^g Ps. lxxi. 15, 16,

^h Phil. iii. 9.

Shall we then boast as if we were more penitent than David, more zealous than Paul?—

Let us rather humble ourselves in the language of Jobⁱ—

And determine to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ^k—]

2. What encouragement is here afforded to mourning penitents !

[If David did not despair of mercy, who else can have cause to do so?—

If the blood of Christ could so purge *him*, why may it not *us* also?—

If it had such efficacy a thousand years before it was shed, surely it will not be less efficacious now it has been poured forth—

But it is not the mere shedding of Christ's blood that will profit us—

We must, by faith, apply it to our own souls—

Let us then go to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh such good things to us^l—

Let us cry with earnest and repeated entreaties, “Purge *me*, wash *me*”—

Thus shall our polluted souls be whiter than snow itself—

And ere long we shall join in that general chorus^m—]

ⁱ Job ix. 15. and xl. 4.

^k Gal. vi. 14.

^l Heb. xii. 24.

^m Rev. i. 5, 6.

CXL. THE CHRISTIAN A NEW CREATURE.

2 Cor. v. 17. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

A FAITHFUL discharge of our duty to God has in every age rather provoked the displeasure, than conciliated the favour, of a wicked world. The most eminent characters, instead of escaping censure by means of their distinguished piety, have on the contrary incurred the greatest portion of obloquy and reproach. It was thus that St. Paul's love and zeal were requited by many at Corinth; he was deemed “beside himself.” But indifferent both to their censure and applause, he declared to them the motives by which he was actuated; he told them plainly that he was under the constraining influence of the love of Christ, and that, however strange his views and actions might appear, they, if they were Christians indeed, would certainly adopt and imitate them; their

present views and habits would pass away, and all become new. In the words of the text we have the character of a Christian

I. Figuratively expressed

A man is said to be "in Christ," when he is ingrafted into him as a branch of the living vine, or, in other words, when he truly believes in Christ: he is then a Christian. But in order to shew what a change every man experiences when he becomes a Christian, the apostle says of him that he is "a new creation^a." In this term there is a reference to the creation of the world, which may be considered as a type or pattern of that work, which God performs in the hearts of his people. The correspondence between them may be seen in the *manner*, the *order*, and the *end* of their formation

1. In the manner

[The world was created by God, according to his own sovereign will, without the intervention of human aid: and, though brought into existence in a moment, was gradually perfected in its various parts^b. Thus the souls of God's people are regenerated purely by the sovereign will of God, and entirely through the agency of his word and spirit^c; though they use the appointed means, it is God alone that renders those means effectual^d; "He who made the light to shine out of darkness, shines into their hearts to give them the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus^e." There is an instant of time, however unknown to us, when the new man as well as the old, receives the vital principle; a moment, wherein we are "quickened from the dead," and "pass from death unto life:" but the work of grace is carried on in a constant progression, and "the inward man is renewed day by day^f."]

2. In the order

[Light was the first thing that was produced in the material world; and, after that, the confused chaos was reduced to such a state as that there should be an harmony in all the parts, and a subserviency in each to the good of the whole. Thus light is first darted into the mind of the regenerate man^g; a view of his guilt and misery is given to him, and then his disorderly

^a Κτίσις.

^b Gen. i. 3—31.

^c Jam. i. 18. John i. 13. Tit. iii. 5.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6. and Eph. ii. 10. ^e 2 Cor. iv. 6. ^f Ib. 16.

^g Col. iii. 10.

disorderly passions, which blinded his judgment and sensualized his soul, are rendered subject to reason and religion^b.]

3. In the end

[The world was formed by God for his own glory : as all things were by him, so also were they *for* himⁱ. It is for this end also that he renews the souls of men after his own image. He rejoices indeed in the good of his creatures, and in a subordinate measure may propose that as the end of his dispensations : but we are assured his principal intent is, to shew forth the exceeding riches of his own grace, and to exalt himself in the eyes of his redeemed people^k.]

We are at no loss to understand the preceding figure, since we have, in the text, its import

II. Plainly declared

Justly is a work of grace represented as a new creation ; for, as in the reduction of the confused chaos to order and beauty, so also in the restoration of the soul after God's image, "old things pass away and all things become new." The Christian experiences this change

1. In his views of every important subject

[He once judged *sin* to be a light and venial evil : if it were of a very gross nature indeed, or committed against himself in particular, he might feel some indignation against it : but if it were not reprobated by the world, or injurious to himself, he would behold it without sorrow and practise it without remorse. But very different are his views of it when once his eyes are opened to behold it in its true colours : it then appears to him as base, loathsome, abominable : he hates it from his inmost soul : he desires deliverance from it as much as from hell itself : he would not harbour it in his heart for one moment, but would extirpate it utterly, as well from his thoughts as from his actions. Nor are his sentiments less altered respecting *Christ* : he once felt no love towards him, notwithstanding he complimented him with the name of Saviour. But now the name of Jesus is precious to him : he is filled with admiring thoughts of his incomprehensible love : he adores him with devoutest affection ; and "cleaves to him with full purpose of heart." He once "saw no beauty nor comeliness in him ;" but now views him as "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." The same change takes place with respect to the *world*, and *holiness*, and every thing that has any relation to eternity : so that he really becomes altogether a new creature.]

2. In

^b Eph. i. 17, 18. Col. i. 9, 10. ⁱ Ib. ver. 16. Rev. iv. 11.

^k Eph. ii. 7.

2. In the great ends and aim of his life

[The unregenerate man, to whatever class he may belong, whether he be sensual and profane, or moral and devout, invariably makes *self* the principle and end of all his actions: his life is one continued scene of self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-complacency. He makes his very duties to God subservient to his main end of gratifying his desire after self-approbation and the applause of man. But these old desires are mortified when once he becomes a real Christian: they will indeed often rise in his mind, because he is "renewed only in part;" but he has a far higher end, which he infinitely prefers, and to which he gives a deliberate, determined ascendancy. He has a concern for the honour of his God; and he strives that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus. Whether his actions be of a civil or religious nature, he still proposes to himself the same end, to glorify God with his body and his spirit which are God's¹. To this the apostle seems to have peculiar respect in the preceding context^m; nor is there any thing that more strongly characterizes the child of God.]

APPLICATION

1. Let every one put this question to himself, *Am I a real Christian?*

[The apostle leaves no room for exceptions in favour of any man whatsoever; "if *any* man be a Christian, he is, and must be, a new creature." Nor does this import a mere change from profligacy to morality, or from a neglect of outward duties to the performance of them: the change must be *entire*; it must pervade every faculty of the soul; it must influence all our words and actions, our thoughts and desires, our motives and principles. *Has then this great change been accomplished in us?* On this point eternity depends. O that we might not give sleep to our eyes or slumber to our eyelids, till we can return a favourable answer upon sure and scriptural grounds!]

2. Let those who have experienced a work of grace, seek to have it carried on and perfected in their souls

[It must ever be remembered, that the renovation of the soul is a gradual and progressive work: we are to be continually putting off the old man, and putting on the newⁿ. Let us then not rest in low attainments; but rather, "forgetting the things that are behind, let us press forward unto that which

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 11. 1 Cor. vi. 20. 1 Cor. x. 31.

^m See ver. 15. with which, rather than with ver. 16. the text is connected.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 22--24.

which is before." Let us beg of God to "perfect that which concerneth us," and to form us altogether "into his own image in righteousness and true holiness." It is by our progress that we must manifest the work to have been begun; and then only can we be sure that our path is right, when, "like the light, it shineth more and more unto the perfect day."]

CXLI. JACOB'S VISION A TYPE OF THE MINISTRATION OF ANGELS TO CHRIST.

Gen. xxviii. 12, 13. *And he dreamed; and behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord God stood above it.*

NOW that God has given to the world a complete revelation of his mind and will, we are no longer to expect any extraordinary and personal communications with him: but, in former days, he frequently instructed his more favoured servants by dreams and visions. The particular vision recorded in the passage before us is almost universally considered as typical, though few, if any, have given any satisfactory account wherein the type consists. We shall endeavour therefore to put the subject in a just point of view; and for that purpose shall consider

I. The immediate end of the vision

When so remarkable a revelation is vouchsafed to man, we may conclude that some end, worthy of the divine interposition, is to be answered by it. The intent of the vision here given to Jacob, seems to be

1. To dispel his fears of merited evils

[Jacob could not but be conscious that he had acted a base and treacherous part: and that therefore he had incurred the divine displeasure, at the same time that he had excited a murderous rancour in the breast of his injured brother. He was now fleeing to avoid the effects of his brother's wrath, and had but too much reason to dread some righteous judgment from the hand of God. But God, who is altogether sovereign in the distribution of his favours, and frequently bestows them at seasons, when, according to our conceptions, they could be the least expected, appeared to him, with expressions of love and mercy. He assured the unhappy fugitive,

fugitive, that he was reconciled towards him, and would give his angels charge over him to keep him in all his way, to protect him from all danger, and to supply his every want^a. Thus were all his apprehensions at once removed, and his mind restored to perfect peace.]

2. To confirm his hope of promised blessings

[He had received a promise of the birthright, while yet he lay in his mother's womb; and doubtless he had expected its accomplishment. But when he saw his Father dying, and knew that the rights of primogeniture were about to be confirmed to his elder brother, his faith failed him; and, instead of waiting like David for the throne of Saul, he yielded to the solicitations of his mother, and sought to obtain by craft, what, if he had waited God's time, he would have received in a fair and honourable way. And now he had good reason to doubt, whether he had not forfeited his interest in God's promise, and entailed a curse upon himself instead of a blessing. But God, on this occasion, renewed his promise to him, almost in the very terms, in which, but a few hours before, it had been declared by his father^b; and thus assured to him, not only a numerous seed, and the inheritance of Canaan, but (which was infinitely the dearest right of primogeniture) the descent of Christ from his loins. From henceforth therefore we behold him walking stedfastly in the faith of Abraham, looking forward with joy to the day of Christ, and maintaining a conduct suitable to his profession.]

While the vision was replete with personal benefit to Jacob, it conveyed instruction also to the church, by

II. Its typical reference

Instead of supposing, with all writers upon this subject, that the ladder was a type of Christ in his divine and human nature mediating between heaven and earth, (which is fanciful, and without any warrant from scripture) we rather think that the vision itself was the type (if it was indeed a type) and that it prefigured

1. The testimony which angels were to give to Christ

[Our Lord himself has cast the true light on this passage. In his conversation with Nathanael, he tells the young convert, that he should one day see that *realized* in him, which had been *shadowed forth* in Jacob's vision^c. Accordingly we find that as, from the first conception of Christ in the womb to that very hour, the angels had deeply interested themselves in

^a Ver. 15.

^b Compare ver. 13, 14. with ver. 3, 4.

^c John i. 51.

in every thing that related to him, so they continued on all occasions to wait upon him, to soothe his sorrows, to animate his courage, to fulfil his will, and to bear testimony on his behalf^d. More than twelve legions of them would have come to his succour if he had desired their aid^e. Here then is a correspondence between the type and antitype: Jesus was a man of sorrows, and cast out by his brethren, who said, "This is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours^f:" but God would not leave his beloved Son without witness, or without support; and therefore opened a communication between heaven and earth, that the angels might have continual access to him, whilst "he himself stood, as it were, at the top of the ladder" to direct their operations.]

2. The confirmation which his people's faith was to receive from that testimony

[The circumstances of Nathanael and his other disciples, to whom this *ocular* demonstration was to be given, were not unlike to those of Jacob, to whom the *vision* was vouchsafed. They had believed in Jesus; but their faith was to be sorely tried, so that they should be reduced almost to despair. There was however a seasonable support to be afforded them by the intervention and agency of angels. It was the repeated testimony of angels that first inspired them with hope^g, and that, afterwards, at the time of Christ's ascension into heaven, filled them all with a pleasing expectation, that they should one day see him come again in power and great glory^h. In consequence of their declarations, no less than of the declarations of Christ himself, "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy," and waited for the promised effusion of the Holy Ghost, "knowing in whom they had believed, and assured that he would keep that which they had committed to him." Thus in this respect also did the type receive a suitable accomplishment.]

For our further IMPROVEMENT of this history, we may observe

1. There is no person so guilty, but God is willing and desirous to shew mercy to him

[We cannot but admire the extent and freeness of that mercy with which God revealed himself to this guilty fugitive. We have a similar instance in the mercy shewn to Saul, at the very instant he was "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christⁱ." And, has not the apostle

^d Matt. iv. 11. Luke xxii. 43. and xxiv. 4, 5, 6, 7, 23.

^e Matt. xxvi. 53.

^f Luke xx. 14.

^g John xx. 12.

^h Acts i. 11.

ⁱ Acts ix. 1—6.

apostle told us that he was intended of God to be in this respect a monument of God's long-suffering, and a pattern to those who should hereafter believe on him^k?" Let none then despair; but, whatever evils they have brought upon themselves by their iniquities, and whatever reason they may have to dread the wrath, either of God or man, let them call to mind the example before us; and turn unto him, who has promised "that he will in no wise cast them out."]

2. There is no distress so great, but God is able and willing to deliver us from it

[God has thousands of angels at his command, and has appointed them to "minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation^l." These he orders to "encamp round about his people, and deliver them^m." Let us then suppose ourselves as destitute as Jacob himself, having only the earth for our bed, a stone for our pillow, and no other canopy than the heavens; still, a vision of God, with the ministry of his angels, shall render our situation both comfortable and happy; yea, shall make it appear to us as "the very house of God, the gate of heavenⁿ." And such a confirmation will these "visions of the Almighty" give to our faith and hope, that we shall be fitted for all future trials, and be enabled to testify on God's behalf, that "he will never leave his people, till he has fulfilled to them his promises in their utmost extent^o."]

^k 1 Tim. i. 16.

^l Heb. i. 14.

^m Ps. xxxiv. 7.

ⁿ Ver. 17.

^o Ver. 15.

CXLII. THE BURNING BUSH.

Exod. iii. 2, 3. *The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.*

IF God have on some occasions revealed himself to persons, when, like Saul, they have been in the very act of committing the most heinous sins^a, he has more generally favoured them when they have been occupied, like the shepherds, in their proper calling^b. Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, when God appeared to him in a burning bush, and gave him a commission to deliver Israel from their bondage in Egypt.

By

^a Acts ix. 4.

^b Luke ii. 8, 9.

By this extraordinary appearance God not merely awakened the curiosity of Moses, but conveyed to him some very important instruction ; to elucidate which we shall

I. Shew what was intended by the burning bush

It was intended to represent the state and condition

1. Of the Israelites in Egypt

[They were cruelly oppressed, and every effort was made to destroy them^c. Nor had they in themselves any more ability to withstand their enemies, than a thorny bush has to resist the action of fire. Yet they were not only preserved from destruction, but they even multiplied in proportion as means were used to prevent their increase.]

2. Of the church of God in the world

[The church, whose state was typified by that of Israel, has at all times suffered by persecution, though it has enjoyed some intervals of comparative rest. And, considering that all the powers of the world have been confederate against it, we may well be amazed that it has not been utterly consumed. But it has endured the fiery trial to this hour, and still defies the impotent attacks of all its adversaries.]

3. Of every individual in the church

[The declaration that "all who would live godly in Christ Jesus should suffer persecution" has been verified in every place and every age: "the third part are, and ever will be, brought through the fire." And it is no less than a miracle, that, when the believer has so many enemies, both without and within, he does not "make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience." But the furnace, instead of destroying, purifies and refines him ; and his very graces are perfected by the trials that endanger their existence^d.]

Having pointed out both the primary and more remote signification of this phænomenon, we shall

II. Account for the miracle which it exhibited

Well might the sight of a bush burning, but not consumed, excite the astonishment of Moses : but his wonder would cease when he found that *God was in the bush*

The person here called "the angel of the Lord" was Christ

[The angel expressly called himself "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" which sufficiently proves that he could not be a *created* angel, seeing that

^c Exod. i. 9—22.

^d Rom. v. 3—5.

that it would be the most daring blasphemy in any creature to assume that incommunicable title of Jehovah: yet it was not God the Father: for St. Stephen, recording this history, informs us, that “God sent Moses by the hand of the angel^c,” consequently the angel was God the Son, and not God the Father. Indeed Christ, who is elsewhere called “The angel of the covenant,” was the person, who, in *all* the appearances of God to man, assumed the human or angelic shape; thereby preparing the world for the fuller manifestation of himself in his incarnate state.]

It was his presence with the Israelites that prevented their destruction

[He was in the bush, and *therefore* the bush was not consumed: so he was in the midst of his oppressed people; and *therefore* the Egyptians could not prevail against them. Christ was among them before he gave them any symbol of his presence; for it was he who rendered the assistance of the midwives unnecessary, and emboldened them to withstand the commands of Pharaoh. He was afterwards with them in the pillar and the cloud, protecting them from the Egyptian hosts, and stopping the progress of their enemies till they were overwhelmed in the sea. When, for the punishment of their sins, he refused to go with them, they were sure to be overpowered^f: but whenever he returned in mercy to them, they prospered and prevailed.]

It is that same presence that preserves the church and every member of it

[Christ has said, “Lo, I am with you alway even to the end of the world;” and hence it is that “the gates of hell have never prevailed against the church;” yea, we are assured, they never shall prevail. We are also told that “he dwelleth in the hearts” of all his people^g, and is “their life^h,” and that, wherein soever they live and act, it is not so much they, as Christ in themⁱ. It is by this consideration that he encourages them to “go through fire and water,” persuaded that no evil shall happen to them^k. And to his continued interposition and support they must ascribe their preservation in every danger, and their deliverance from every enemy^l.]

Let us now “*turn aside and behold this great sight*” (let us turn from every worldly thought, and inspect this wonderful appearance, not with curiosity, but profoundest reverence) let us notice herein

1. The

* Acts vii. 30—35.

^g Eph. iii. 17.

^k Ps. xlv. 5.

^f Numb. xiv. 42—45. Josh. vii. 4, 5.

^h Col. iii. 4.

ⁱ Ps. cxxiv. 1—5.

^l Gal. ii. 20.

1. The state of the church

[Are any discouraged by reason of their great trials? Be it known that tribulation is the way to the kingdom; and all, who arrive there, have trodden the same path^m. Nor need we be alarmed at any fire that is kindled for us, since Christ will be with us in the midst of it, and “bring us out of it purified as goldⁿ.”]

2. The concern of God for his church

[In seasons of great trial we are tempted to think that God has forsaken us: but He never was more immediately present with the Hebrew youths, than when they were cast into the furnace; nor did he ever feel more love to his own Son, than in the hour when he cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Let us then learn to trust God, and expect that, when we walk through the fire, we shall not be burnt^o.]

3. The difference between the Lord's people and others

[To his own people “God is a wall of fire” for their protection^p: to all others “he is a consuming fire” for their destruction^q. Not but that even they shall, in some sense, be as the burning bush, unconsumed in the midst of flames; for “their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.” O dreadful state! “who shall dwell with everlasting burnings^r?” Let us then seek “the good will of him who dwelt in the bush^s.” So shall we be eternal monuments of his power and grace, whilst others are kept as monuments of his righteous indignation.]

^m Acts xiv. 22. Rev. vii. 14.

ⁿ Isai. xli. 10.

^o Isai. xlili. 2.

^p Zech. ii. 5.

^q Heb. xii. 29.

^r Isai. xxxiii. 14.

^s Deut. xxxiii. 16.

CXLIII. GOD THE PROTECTOR OF HIS CHURCH.

Isai. iv. 5. *The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud, and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.*

THE church of God is frequently represented as hated both by men and devils, and exposed to their united assaults. But it is protected by an invisible and almighty Agent, who keeps it alive, as a spark in the midst of a tempestuous ocean. His watchful eye is ever over it for good: He considers it as his glory, and will therefore himself be its defence. This is promised to the church, in the words before us; in which we are told

I. The church is God's glory

Mount Zion is a name given to the gospel church^a; and a strict attention to the text will shew, that it is here considered as "the glory" of God^b; by which term its members also are expressly designated by God himself^c.

1. The various "dwelling-places of Mount Zion" are his glory

[Wherever Christianity has gained its full ascendant over any family, God will most assuredly be worshipped and served by every member of it. The master will say with Joshua, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord;" and, in order to carry this resolution into effect, he will, like Abraham, command his children, and his household after him^d. His house will be a temple in which he himself officiates as priest; and, as far as he can prevail, he will cause every heart to be an altar to the Lord, that they may daily offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise. Such a family will be like a beautiful garden, filled with "trees of righteousness of the Lord's planting, that He may be glorified^e;" and while God calls himself "their God," he will dignify them with the exalted appellation of "his people," and "his servants in whom he will be glorified^f."]

2. The "assemblies of Mount Zion" also are his glory

[As the Israelites came up thrice every year to worship God at Jerusalem, so on every sabbath do his people assemble for the exercise of social and public worship. In those holy convocations does every one speak of his glory^g; and his ministers in particular, who are "the glory of Christ^h," proclaim the riches of his grace and mercy. In these God vouchsafes his more peculiar presence; for "he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacobⁱ." "He comes down as in the days of old^k, and fills the place with his glory;" he pours out his Spirit in a more abundant measure; and by communicating the blessings of grace and peace, he "glorifies the house of his glory^l."]

While they are thus highly esteemed by God, they are favoured with his peculiar care; for

II. God

^a Heb. xii. 22.
the "dwelling-places," &c. before mentioned.

^d Josh. xxiv. 15. Gen. xviii. 19.

^f Jer. xxxi. 1. Isai. xlix. 3.

Ps. lxxxvii. 2.

Isai. lx. 7.

^b "The glory" evidently relates to

^c Isai. xlv. 13.

^e Isai. lxi. 3.

^g Ps. xxix. 9. ^h 2 Cor. viii. 23.

^k Exod. xl. 34, 35. 2 Chron. vii. 1.

II. God is the church's guardian

The Israelites, when coming out of Egypt, had a cloud with them as a symbol of the divine presence^m. This was intended both to guide them in their journeys, and to protect them from their enemies. And in reference to it God promises to his church to be

1. Her guide

[The cloud went before the people in all their journeys, moving or resting when it was proper for them to move, or restⁿ. Thus will God direct the concerns of his church. Though he will not interpose in the same *visible* manner, yet he will manifest the same attention to its interests, and guide it, with the same unerring hand. Nor is it to the church at large only that God extends his care; he will regard "the dwelling-places of Mount Zion" no less than "her assemblies;" and consult the welfare of the meanest individual as much as of the largest community^o. Does any one look up to him for direction? He says, "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way^p:" "He shall have an unction of the Holy one that shall teach him all things^q;" and so plainly shall his path be marked, that, "though a fool, he shall not err therein^r." Is he involved in any peculiar difficulty? He shall hear a voice behind him, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it^s." And though his path may often appear dubious, yet he shall find at last that he has been "led in *the right way* to the city of habitation^t."]

2. Her defence

[The cloud on one occasion went behind the Israelites, and wore a dark and threatening aspect to their enemies, while it gave light to *them*^u. Thus will God give salvation for walls and bulwarks to his church^x. No weapon that is formed against it shall prosper^y: God will not only go before it, but be its rear-ward^z: nor shall the gates of hell ever prevail against it^a. Never for one moment will he intermit his care^b: his protection shall be as effectual as that of lofty mountains^c, or an impassable river^d, or a wall of fire^e. And its preservation shall be seen to be evidently *his* work, as much as the "creation" itself; so that all who behold it shall say, This hath God wrought^f.]

3. Her

^m Exod. xiii. 21, 22. Neh. ix. 19.[•] Isai. lxvi. 2.^p Ps. xxv. 9.^r Isai. xxxv. 8.^s Isai. xxx. 21.ⁿ Exod. xiv. 19, 20.^x Isai. xxvi. 1.^z Isai. lviii. 8.^a Matt. xvi. 18.^c Ps. cxxv. 2.^d Isai. xxxiii. 21.^f Job xii. 9. Isai. xli. 4.ⁿ Exod. xl. 34—38.^q 1 John ii. 20.^t Ps. cvii. 7.^y Isai. liv. 17.^b Isai. xxvii. 3.^e Zech. ii. 5.

3. Her glory

[It was the presence of God with Israel of old that marked them as his peculiar people. They were feared on this account, so that "all the inhabitants of Canaan melted because of them^g;" as also terror was diffused through the whole camp of the Philistines^h. Thus it is with the church at this time; it is the presence of God in it that renders it the joy of the whole earthⁱ. It is God's glory that is seen upon it, which brings kings to the brightness of its rising^k. There is often a power in the ordinances that evidences the presence of the Deity, and constrains his most inveterate enemies to submit themselves to him, and to unite themselves to his church^l. And it will be in consequence of that more abundant manifestation of his presence which shall be vouchsafed to the church at a future period, that all the nations of the earth shall seek with eagerness an interest in its privileges, and a participation of its blessings^m. Persons of all ranks, from the lofty "fir-tree" to the humble "box," shall come together to the church, of which it will be said, "The Lord is thine everlasting light, and *thy God thy glory*."ⁿ]

INFER

1. How must we admire the condescension of God!

[If we were all holy as the angels, it would be a wonderful condescension in God to pay such attention to us: how adorable then is that goodness which notices us in our fallen state, and which is so incessantly occupied in the promotion of our welfare! Were an earthly monarch to visit the humblest cottages, and enter into all the concerns of his poorest subjects, the whole world would resound with his praises: shall we not then admire the King of kings, and magnify him with thanksgiving? Only let us realize the truths contained in the text, and our hearts will quickly overflow with wonder, love, and praise.]

2. How earnestly should we desire to participate the church's privileges!

[The same cloud was dark to Egypt, and light to Israel: thus also is the church now distinguished from the world around it: the same word is a savour of life to the salvation of the church, and a savour of death to the condemnation of its enemies: yea, the same precious Saviour also is to the one a sanctuary; but to the other a stumbling-block, and a rock of offence.]

^g Josh. ii. 9, 11.

^h 1 Sam. iv. 7.

ⁱ Ps. xlviii. 2.

^k Isai. lx. 1—3.

^l 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

^m Zech. viii. 23.

ⁿ Isai. lx. 13, 14, 15, 16, 19.

offence. O how desirable then is it to be numbered with God's Israel, and to come to mount Zion, the church of the living God! Let us then come out of Egypt: let us put ourselves under the direction and care of God: and, in dependence on his power and faithfulness, prosecute our journey toward the heavenly Canaan.]

CXLIV. THE LIVING BREAD.

John vi. 34. *Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.*

A FANCIED approbation of the gospel will consist with rooted enmity against it. But such an approbation always arises from carnal, or partial views of the truth. Many love God under the idea "that He is such an one as themselves." Thus the Samaritan woman desired the living water, that she might have no more occasion to go to the well^a. Thus also the people, whom our Lord was now addressing, seem to have misapprehended our Saviour's meaning. They had desired him to confirm his divine mission by some miracle equal to what Moses had wrought for their forefathers in the wilderness^b. Our Lord assured them that He himself was the true bread, of which the manna was only a type and figure. They, little knowing what they asked for, desired him to give them the bread of which he spake. The petition however, in itself, was good. That you may be led to offer it in a more intelligent manner, we shall set before you

I. The excellence of that bread

Our Lord enters very minutely into this subject. He institutes a comparison between the manna, and himself as the bread of life; and shews the superiority of the true bread

1. In its origin

[They supposed that the manna had been given them from heaven: whereas it came only from the clouds^c; and was as earthly in its nature as if it had been formed like common bread. But Christ himself was the true bread^d: and He came down from heaven. His abode from all eternity had been

^a John iv. 15.

^c Ver. 32.

^b Ver. 31.

^d Ver. 48.

been in the bosom of his Father. And he was now come down from thence to be the food of his chosen people^c.]

2. In its properties

[The manna, like any other bread, was suited only to the body; nor could it give life to that, but only maintain its life; and after all, the bodies which it nourished would die at last^f. But the true bread was intended for the soul. Nor would it merely support it when alive, but quicken it when dead^g. Yea, the soul, once quickened by it, should never die^h. Christ himself being their life, they should live *by* him hereⁱ, and *with* him for ever^k.]

3. In its uses

[The manna was very confined as to its use. It was for one nation only; whereas the true bread is intended for the use of all mankind^l. It is *more extensively necessary*. The Israelites might as easily have been supported by other food. And we can find many substitutes for bread. But without Christ, no man can live^m. Neither earth nor heaven can provide a substitute for him. That bread is equally needed by every child of man. It is also *more extensively suitable*. Persons may be so disordered as to be incapable of enjoying, or even digesting, common bread. But in whatever state we be, Christ is the proper food of the soul. He is a bread, which is suited both, as milk, to babes, and, as strong meat, to them that are of ageⁿ. Further, it is *more extensively satisfying*. The manna could supply one want. Whatever abundance of bread we have, we may need a variety of other things, for want of which we may even perish. But if we have Christ, we have all things. We can want nothing which is good for the body^o; nor any thing that relates to the soul^p. He is food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, riches to the poor, health to the sick, life to the dead^q; He is ALL AND IN ALL^r.]

Such a glorious account of this bread being given by Christ himself, it becomes us to enquire into

II. The means by which it may be obtained

Every provision for the body must be obtained by labour; but this for the soul must be accepted as a free gift

[We are extremely averse to stand indebted to another for our spiritual sustenance. We should be much better pleased to

^c Ver. 51.

^h Ver. 50, 58.

^l Ver. 33. before cited.

ⁿ Ver. 54—56.

^q Rev. iii. 18. 1 Cor. i. 30.

^f Ver. 49.

ⁱ Ver. 57.

^o Matt. vi. 33.

^g Ver. 33.

^k Col. iii. 4.

^m Ver. 53.

^p Ver. 35.

^r Col. iii. 11.

to earn it by our own industry. But all our exertions for this end are fruitless. If we were to obtain an interest in Christ by our own works, salvation would no longer be of grace^a. We are therefore cautioned against every attempt to gain it in that way^t. We are expressly told that the Israelites were left for ever destitute of this bread, because they would persist in these self-righteous methods of obtaining it^u. We are exhorted to receive it freely, without money and without price^x.]

Nevertheless we are not to decline all kind of labour for it

[We are to seek this bread in prayer^y, and in the use of all God's appointed ordinances. We are to exert ourselves as much in order to obtain it, as if the acquisition of it were the sole effect of our labour. But we are at the same time to depend as much upon God for it, as if we used no endeavours whatever to procure it. Nor is there any inconsistency in such a view of our duty. Our Lord himself says, "*Labour for the meat, which the Son of man shall give you*"^z.]

APPLICATION

[Let us seek it by prayer and faith. Let us be thankful that it is sent us in such rich abundance. Let us gather it fresh every day and hour^a. Nor once attempt to hoard it for future use^b. There is a fulness in Christ to satisfy our every want. Nor shall we ever be refused if we plead with him as we ought to do^c. Let us remember, that in our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare^d. And rest assured, that by feeding upon Christ, we shall find him to be meat indeed and drink indeed^e.]

^a Rom. xi. 6.

^t Gal. v. 2—4.

^u Rom. ix. 30—32.

^x Isai. lv. 1, 2.

^y The text.

^z John vi. 27.

^a Exod. xvi. 16.

^b Ib. ver. 19, 20.

^c Matt. xv. 26—28.

^d Luke xv. 17, 18.

^e John vi. 55.

CXLV. THE MANNA AND THE ROCK TYPES OF CHRIST.

1 Cor. x. 3, 4. *They did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink. (For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.)*

THOUGH it is certain that the covenant of grace is ordered in all things and sure, and that God will fulfil his promises to all who believe, yet there is no man so absolutely assured of his own interest in the divine favour, as that he can with safety cast off all watchfulness and circumspection. The Corinthians, by going to the

utmost verge of their Christian liberty in eating things offered to idols, were in danger of being drawn back into actual idolatry. The apostle recommends to them therefore to exercise self-denial, as well for their own sake, that they might not be ensnared, as for the sake of others, whose weak consciences might be wounded. He tells them that he himself felt the necessity of mortifying all his appetites, and that he was obliged to "keep his body under, and to bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away." He then proceeds to remind them of the Israelites, who, notwithstanding the numberless privileges that they enjoyed, as God's peculiar people, perished in the wilderness for their manifold provocations. Among the privileges which he specifies, we shall fix our attention upon that referred to in the text: and shall take occasion from it to enquire

I. What was that spiritual food which the Israelites partook of in the wilderness?

God, having brought his people into the wilderness, sustained them there with miraculous supplies of bread and water

[About six weeks after their departure out of Egypt^a, their provisions were spent, and they began to be in want of bread. God therefore promised them a constant supply from day to day; forbidding them to reserve any for the morrow, except on the day preceding the sabbath, when they were to gather sufficient for two days consumption. This food (which for want of any more appropriate name they called manna, i. e. a portion) descended from the clouds every night; and, when the dew that covered it was exhaled by the sun, it appeared on the face of the ground: it was a very small white thing like coriander seed, which they ground in their mills, and baked; and, in taste, it was like wafers made of fresh oil and honey^b. Of this there was a constant and regular supply for forty years; nor did it ever fail, till their want of it was superseded by the corn, of which they got possession in the land of Canaan. In like manner, water was given them out of a rock in Horeb, by a stroke of that rod, with which Moses had divided the Red Sea^c: and it was made to follow them in all their encampments for about thirty-eight years; when,

for

^a Exod. xvi. 1.

^b Ib. 13—31. with Numb. xi. 8.

^c Exod. xvii. 5, 6.

for their further trial, the stream was dried up, and a similar miracle was wrought for them again in Kadesh-barnea^d.]

This food, though carnal in its nature and use, was truly “spiritual;” inasmuch as it was

1. A typical representation of Christ

[Our Lord himself copiously declares this with respect to the manna; draws a parallel between the bread which Moses gave to the Israelites, and himself as the true bread that was given them from heaven; and shews that, as the manna supported the natural life of that nation for a time, so he would give spiritual and eternal life to the whole believing world^e. The same truth also he establishes, in reference to the water that proceeded from the rock. He told the Samaritan woman, that if she would have asked of him he would have given her living water^f. And on another occasion he stood in the place of public concourse, and cried, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink^g,” thereby declaring himself to be the only “well of salvation,” the only rock from whence the living water could proceed. Indeed, the apostle, in the very words of the text, puts this matter beyond a doubt; “they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them;” and “*that Rock was Christ.*”]

2. A sacramental pledge of his blessings

[Under the gospel dispensation there are two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: and these are not only “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace,” but they are also “means whereby we receive that grace, and a pledge to assure us thereof.” Thus when the Israelites were “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” they were consecrated unto God; and they received, as it were, an earnest from him, that all the blessings of his covenant should in due time be imparted to them, unless they, by their violation of the covenant, should provoke him to withhold them. In the same manner the bread and water miraculously given and continued to them, were a pledge, that they should one day “eat of the hidden manna,” and “drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand for evermore,” provided they continued stedfast in the covenant, and walked worthy of their heavenly calling. Thus while their daily food typically represented, and, to those who partook of it in faith, really conveyed, spiritual blessings, it was “an earnest to them of that Spirit,” whom the water typified, and “an earnest of that inheritance,” which Christ should purchase for them by his obedience unto death^h.]

And

^d Numb. xx. 8—11.

^e John vi. 48—58.

^f John iv. 10, 14.

^g John vii. 37, 38.

^h 2 Cor. i. 22. Eph. i. 14.

And that this food was not peculiar to them may be shewn by considering

II. In what respects it was the same with that which we now partake of

When the apostle says, that they all eat *the same* spiritual meat, he does not mean that all the Israelites subsisted on the same food (for that was obvious enough, and was of no consequence to his subject) but that their spiritual food, represented by the manna and the water, was the same that still nourishes the church of God. To elucidate this we may observe, it was the same

1. In its nature and substance

[As their bodies could not have maintained their vigour without the daily use of bread and water, so neither could their souls flourish, unless they daily fed upon Christ, the living bread, and received from him renewed communications of his Spirit. And are there any other means of subsistence for our souls? Has not our Lord expressly told us, that "except we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we have no life in us?" Has not St. Paul also assured us, that none can belong to Christ unless they be partakers of his Spiritⁱ? We are as destitute of strength in ourselves as the Israelites were; and need the same direction, support, and succour. If any man could be sufficient of himself, surely the great apostle of the Gentiles must: but he corrects himself instantly when he appeared to have suggested an idea that was capable of that interpretation; "I live," says he, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me^k." This is precisely what the believers in the wilderness did, when they subsisted on their spiritual food; and it is what every believer must do as long as the world shall stand.]

2. In its use and tendency

[The daily supply of manna, and of the water from the rock, continually reminded them of their dependence upon God, and encouraged them to serve him with a willing mind. But the conveyance of spiritual blessings to them under these symbols would go further still, and actually produce the dispositions, which the outward blessings could only tacitly recommend. And what are the dispositions which the eating of the bread of life, and the drinking of the living water uniformly create? Do they not lead us to a dependence on God's care, and a devotedness to his service? The very end for which

ⁱ Rom. viii. 9.

^k Gal. ii. 20.

which our Saviour died, was, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them: no doubt therefore his love, when shed abroad in the heart, will incline us to do this¹; and his grace communicated to the soul, will enable us to do it.]

We may LEARN from hence

1. In what spirit we should attend the ordinances of the gospel

[The Israelites were left to feel their need of food before the miraculous supplies were given them: and with what avidity would they gather up the new created bread! with what insatiable appetite would they bow down to drink of the flowing stream! Such is the spirit with which we should approach the ordinances of our God. In them the manna is rained round about our tents: in them the rock is struck, and the waters of salvation flow around us: and if we come hungry and thirsting, we shall never be sent empty away. Let none then consider the ordinances as mere occasions for gratifying their curiosity, but as the place where spiritual food is set before them for the support and comfort of their souls. The Israelites would ask but one question; Is this provision suited to my necessities? So neither should we concern ourselves much about the *manner* in which the ordinances are dispensed, but rather go, that we may receive Christ in them, and have more abundant communications of his Spirit imparted to us.]

2. What should be the habit of our minds when we have partaken of spiritual blessings

[The particular object of the apostle in the text is, to inculcate the necessity of fear and caution: and the argument he uses is well calculated to effect his purpose. Two millions of Israelites came out of Egypt: they were brought in safety through the Red Sea, and supported by this miraculous food: yet, of all who had attained the age of twenty, two only were suffered to enter into the promised land. All the rest perished in the wilderness: and the very profession which they made, and the privileges which they enjoyed, served but to enhance, in most instances, it is to be feared, their eternal condemnation. Moreover they were intended by God himself as examples to us^m; that we, admonished by their fate, might suppress all irregular desires, and walk more worthy of our high calling. Well therefore does the apostle add, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We never are so much in danger as when we think ourselves most secure. Let us then "not be high-minded, but fear:" whatever mercies we

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^m Τύποι, ver. 6, 11.

we have experienced, and whatever enjoyment of *spiritual* blessings may have been vouchsafed to us, let us remember, that we are not beyond the reach of temptation: we may “have escaped for a while the pollutions of the world, and yet be again entangled therein and overcomeⁿ:” it is not sufficient for us to have “tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come:” we may still “fall away, and return to a state from whence we shall never be renewed to repentance^o.” “Let all then take heed, lest, a promise being left them of entering into God’s rest, they should by any means come short of it^p.”]

ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^o Heb. vi. 5, 6.

^p Heb. iv. 1.

THE PROPHECIES.

CXLVI. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROPHECIES.

1 Pet. i. 10—12. *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you, by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

THE same “salvation” that is made known to us was revealed from the beginning—

It was gradually unfolded to the world by many succeeding prophets—

It is indeed exhibited as with meridian splendor in the New Testament—

Yet by comparing the predictions of the prophets with the writings of the apostles, we attain at once the fullest evidence of its divine original, and the deepest insight into its mysterious doctrines—

The truth of this observation will appear, while we consider

I. The substance of the prophecies

Though

Though many things contained in them related only to the times wherein they were written, yet much of them undoubtedly relates to future and distant periods

The grand scope of them *in the general* is "the grace that should come unto us"

[The gospel is called "grace," because it is the highest expression of God's kindness towards our guilty world—

It declares the wonderful provision which he has made for our recovery—

And calls us to receive his blessings as a free unmerited gift—

It represents every part of our salvation as the effect of his grace—

And requires us now, as well as hereafter, to give him all the glory of it—]

More particularly Christ is the sum and substance of the prophecies

[God himself tells us that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"^a—

The prophets "testified plainly of *the sufferings* of Christ"—

So minutely did they describe the smallest and most improbable circumstances of his death, that their writings appear rather like a narration than a prophecy^b—

Nor did they speak less accurately respecting "*his glory* that should follow"^c—

Every step of his exaltation, from his resurrection to his future coming to judge the world, is distinctly marked^c—

And the triumph of his gospel over the benighted Gentiles is proclaimed with confidence and exultation^d—]

As in this light they deserve the deepest attention, so do they also on account of

II. The importance of them

The words before us mark the importance of the prophecies in a variety of views

1. They were dictated by "the Spirit of Christ"

[The Holy Ghost was the agent whom Christ employed from the beginning^e—

Through him did Christ inspire the prophets, and enlighten the world^f—

Thus were all the prophecies clearly of divine original—

And

^a Rev. xix. 10. and John v. 39.

^b See Ps. xxii. 8, 16, 18. and lxix. 21. and Isai. liii.

^c Ps. lxviii. 18. and ii. 6.

^d Ps. ii. 8. Compare Rom. xv. 9—12.

^e Compare 1 Pet. iii. 18—20.

^f 2 Pet. i. 21.

And can any thing more strongly mark their value and importance?—]

2. The prophets themselves “enquired and searched diligently” into their meaning

[The inspired men did not understand the precise import of their own prophecies—

They only knew that they “ministered to the church in distant ages”—

But they studied the word, and sometimes with good effect, to gain an insight into the intentions and purposes of God^z—

And if they judged their predictions so important while they were involved in obscurity, shall they be less valuable to us who have seen their accomplishment?—]

3. The apostles, in declaring their accomplishment, received miraculous testimonies from the Holy Ghost

[They, “who first preached the gospel, *reported those things as done*, which the prophets had *beforehand testified*” as to be done in due time—

And their word was accompanied “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven^h”—

Nor was this divine seal ever more immediately set to their ministrations than when they expressly referred to the prophecies as fulfilled in Jesusⁱ—

Nothing surely could put a greater honour on the prophecies than this—]

4. The very angels “desire to look into them”

[The angelic figures over the ark were formed looking down upon it^k—

This intimated the interest they feel in the work of redemption—

They are indeed made wiser by the revelation given to the church^l—

Though they dwell in the presence of God they desire to know more of this mystery—

Though they have no personal interest in it, they long to comprehend it—

Can we then, whose interest in it is so great, have low thoughts of any part of those scriptures which exhibit and illustrate it?—]

INFER

1. What a mercy is it to live under the full light of the gospel!

[Those things, which the patriarchs saw only in types and

^z Dan. ix. 2.

^h Heb. ii. 4.

ⁱ Acts x. 43, 44.

^k Exod. xxv. 20.

^l Eph. iii. 10.

and prophecies, we are privileged to enjoy in their substance and accomplishment—

Well therefore does Christ say to us, “Blessed are your eyes, blessed are your ears”—

But if our light be greater than theirs, our obligations to follow it are proportionably increased—

And if we neglect to improve it, surely both prophets and angels will appear against us to condemn us—]

2. In searching the scriptures we should attend particularly to what is said of Christ

[Many read the scriptures without ever discovering the fulness and excellency of Christ—

But as “they testify of him,” so we are most concerned in what relates to him—

Let us then fix our eyes diligently on that ark of God—

Let us treasure up in our minds whatever is spoken of “his sufferings and glory”—

And, “mixing faith with what we read,” let us seek to be made wise unto salvation—]

CXLVII. CHRIST THE WOMAN’S CONQUERING SEED.

Gen. iii. 15. *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

CHRISTIANITY, though not as old as the creation, is nearly so; since it was introduced immediately upon the fall of man. As the oak with all its branches is contained in the acorn, so was the whole plan of salvation, however copiously unfolded in subsequent revelations, comprehended in the prophecy now before us. Nor had the world for the space of two thousand years any fuller discovery of the way of salvation vouchsafed unto them: all the saints from Adam to Abraham built their hopes upon this one declaration

In opening it to you, we shall

I. Make some remarks on the prophecy

The *occasion* of it is the first thing that demands our attention

[Man had been placed in Paradise: but Satan, envious of his happiness, sought his destruction: to accomplish this end, he insinuated to Eve that the advantages arising from eating of the forbidden fruit would be exceeding great; and that either
God

God had not annexed the penalty of death to the tasting of that fruit, or that, at least, he would never execute his threatening. Having thus, unhappily, prevailed over her, and, by her means, over her husband also, he brought them under the displeasure of God. But God, instead of executing his threatened vengeance upon them, warned the serpent, that though he had prevailed in this instance over the woman, a seed should arise from her, who should finally prevail over him, and rescue man from the miseries which this sin had brought upon him.]

We cannot fail to notice next the *suitableness* of the prophecy to the occasion

[Our first parents having broken the first covenant had no hope whatever arising from it. Nor could they have derived advantage from any remedial law, even though its terms had been ever so easy: because the justice of God required satisfaction for the breach of the former covenant, and the truth of God was pledged to inflict the punishment which their transgression had deserved. Moreover they were now become destitute of either inclination or ability to render unto God any spiritual obedience; so that, whatever law God should give them, they would, if left to themselves, most surely violate it. But in this promise "God laid help upon One that was mighty," and provided for them a full and free salvation.]

Nor should the *seasonableness* of this interposition be forgotten

[Had fallen man been left to himself he must have sunk down in utter despair: he could have entertained no more hope than the fallen angels. But this prospect, that was opened to him, revived his hopes, and encouraged him to return to God. Thus was he raised from despondency, and taught to regard his Maker with a mixture of penitential contrition, filial love, and thankful affiance.]

This prophecy being the root, and indeed the summary of all that followed it, we shall

II. Trace the accomplishment of it

Christ was the person here spoken of as "the seed of the woman"

[He was born, not after the manner of other men, but of a pure virgin: hence he was, in a way of distinction from all others, the seed of the *woman*. And there was a necessity for his being born in this miraculous manner; because, if he had been in the loins of Adam, he had fallen in Adam, and been subject to the curse and condemnation of the law: but, being formed in the womb of a virgin, by the immediate agency of the Holy Ghost, he partook of our nature without participating our guilt and pollution. Had he come into the world defiled by

by sin he could not have taken away our sin, but would have needed a Saviour for himself.]

Between him and Satan God put an irreconcilable enmity

[The very end for which Christ was manifested, was, to destroy the works of the devil; and this purpose he carried on incessantly by expelling him sometimes from the bodies of men, and sometimes from their souls ^a. Satan, on the other hand, laboured no less to destroy him. For this end he stirred up Herod to massacre the infants: for this end he tempted Jesus to cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple: for this end he moved Peter to dissuade him from prosecuting his work, and Judas to betray him, and the chief priests to crucify him ^b. And to this hour does he exert himself to the utmost to prevent the establishment of his kingdom in the world.]

But though Christ was sorely wounded in the combat, he has crushed his adversary

[Satan did indeed prevail to bruise the heel of Jesus, making him "sorrowful even unto death," and instigating his agents to crucify him. But Jesus took him in his own net, and, "by death, destroyed death itself and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." "On the very cross he spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, triumphing over them in it;" and, "in his ascension he led captivity captive." Thus was "the prince of this world judged, and cast out;" yea, "his head was bruised," and his power for ever broken. Nor has Jesus ever ceased to pursue his victory, rescuing the souls of myriads from the dominion of the wicked one, and "turning them from the power of Satan unto God." Thus, by the gospel, "Satan has been made to fall from heaven like lightning." And, at the time appointed, the fatal wound shall be given him, when he shall be divested of the little remnant of his power, and be cast into the bottomless pit, there to be tormented day and night for ever ^c.]

To *improve* each part from the foregoing subject, we may observe

1. *From the prophecy*; How free and sovereign is the grace of God!

[Our first parents had committed the most aggravated sin that can be conceived. They were made perfect; they enjoyed all that they could desire, and above all, the sweetest and most familiar intercourse with their Maker; yet did they yield to the first temptation, notwithstanding their own happiness, with

^a Luke xi. 20. ^b Matt. xvi. 23. Luke xxii. 53. ^c Rev. xx. 2, 3, 10.

with that of all their posterity, was bound up in their obedience. And when they had sinned, instead of going to their God, and imploring mercy, they fled from him, and when called to account for their conduct, excused themselves, and even cast the blame of their transgression upon God; "The woman *whom thou gavest me*, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Yet did God, unsolicited, and of his own sovereign will, promise them a Saviour. Will he then refuse pardon through that Saviour unto those who come unto him, and humble themselves before him? Let this then embolden us in our addresses to him, and drive away every desponding fear.]

2. *From the accomplishment*; How complete and glorious is the salvation of Christ!

[Christ has entered the lists against our great adversary, and has utterly subdued him. And now he invites us to come and put our feet upon his neck. It is true, Satan will yet contend with us; and perhaps in an unguarded moment may wound our heel: but, if we resist him manfully, he can never hurt us; yea, he will flee from us, intimidated and dismayed. We fight with a vanquished enemy; and He, who triumphed over him on the cross, will "bruise him under our feet shortly." Let us only fight in *his* strength, and clothed with the armour which he has prepared for us, and we have no need to fear; for "his glorious throne is our sanctuary^d," and as surely as he has overcome, and is set down upon his throne, we, in due season, shall participate both his victory and his triumphs.]

^d Jer. xvii. 12.

CXLVIII. ABRAHAM'S PROMISED SEED.

Gen. xxii. 18. *In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*

THERE is nothing in man which can merit the divine favour: the promises of God to us are altogether free, resulting wholly from his sovereign grace: yet does God frequently *manifest* his love towards us in consequence of something done by us. Abraham, it should seem, was an idolater, when God first made himself known to him in his native land: and *then* did the Almighty promise, that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed. But, in the passage before us, Abraham is recorded to have performed the most extraordinary act of obedience that ever was known from the foundation of the world:

and God takes occasion from that to renew his promise, and, for his more abundant consolation, to confirm it with an oath. To ascertain the full import of this glorious prophecy, it will be proper to enquire

I. Who is the seed here spoken of

It is not to all the natural descendants, or to that part of them that composed the Jewish nation, or even to the spiritual seed of Abraham, that these words refer: they speak of one particular individual, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. To him all the types direct our attention

[The temple with all its utensils, the priests with all their habits and services, the sacrifices and oblations of every kind, all shadowed forth his work and offices. The principal events in the Jewish history, together with the great persons engaged in them, their lawgiver, their commanders, judges, kings, and prophets, prefigured him in different points of view, and, as so many lines, meet in him as their common centre. On this account we have reason to think that the prophecy before us relates to him.]

2. In him all the prophecies receive their accomplishment

[However some of the prophecies might be partially fulfilled in Solomon or others, it is certain that all of them together were never accomplished in any one but Jesus. They were intended to designate HIM, that, when he should arrive, there might be no doubt of his being the very person foreordained of God to be the Saviour of the world. The minute description of the promised Messiah, together with the marvellous combination of circumstances that marked Jesus as the person foretold, lead us further to believe that the text had particular respect to him.]

3. To him *exclusively* the text is applied by God himself

[St. Paul tells us that *the blessing of Abraham* was to come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ ^a; and that the words of the text related, not to others, but to Christ alone ^b.]

This point being ascertained, let us enquire

II. In what respect all nations are blessed in him

The full accomplishment of the text will not take place till that glorious period when the knowledge of the Lord shall

^a Gal. iii. 14.

^b Ib. 16

shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea. Yet, in a limited sense, all nations have experienced the truth of this prophecy already

1. They are reconciled to God through him

[Christ died not for one nation only; he was a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Many of all nations have already believed in his name, and rejoiced in his salvation: and in every place they who believe in him shall find acceptance with their God ^c.]

2. They are united in one body in him

[He has broken down the middle wall of partition that divided the Jewish and Gentile world, and, having reconciled both unto God in one body by the cross, he has slain the enmity thereby ^d. All mankind are now brought into one family, and are taught to regard each other as brethren: and in proportion as the religion of Jesus gains the ascendant over our hearts, we are united in love to every member of his mystical body.]

3. They are blessed with all spiritual blessings

[There is not any thing that can conduce to our present or future happiness which Jesus will not bestow on his believing people. Adoption into his family, peace in our consciences, holiness in our hearts, and an eternity of glory in the Father's presence, are the certain portion of all his faithful followers. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile; all are admitted to the same privileges, and all shall participate the same enjoyments.]

INFER

1. The antiquity of the gospel

[The sum and substance of the gospel is, that Christ is the only source of all spiritual and eternal blessings. Wherever this truth is strongly urged, men are ready to cry out against it as a *new* doctrine. But we can trace it, not only to the reformers of our church, but to the apostles, yea to Abraham also: for St. Paul declares, that when God spake the words to Abraham, he "*preached the gospel to him*," even that very gospel, whereby he and all the nations of the earth must be saved ^e. Let this truth then no longer be reviled as novel, but be received as the one ground of all our hopes.]

2. The importance of faith

[Abraham's faith in this gospel was imputed to him for righteousness ^f; and by believing the same divine record we also must be justified ^g. No doctrine whatever is more explicitly

^c Col. i. 20—22.

^f Gal. iii. 6.

^d Eph. ii. 14—16.

^g Ib. 7, 9.

^e Gal. iii. 8.

explicitly declared in scripture than this. Let us then acknowledge the necessity of faith, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ as that promised seed, through whom alone the blessings of Abraham can flow down upon us.]

3. The connexion between faith and works

[Faith was that principle which produced in Abraham such exemplary obedience^h: and the same root will bear similar fruits wheresoever it existsⁱ. Indeed the pardon of past sins would be utterly insufficient to make us happy, if it were not accompanied with the renovation of our natures. To this effect St. Peter expounded, as it were, the very words of the text, declaring to the Jews, that conversion from sin was one of the first blessings which the Lord Jesus was sent to bestow^k. Let us then not consider faith and works as opposed to each other, but as possessing distinct offices, the one to justify our souls, the other to honour God, and to manifest the sincerity of our faith.]

^h Heb. xi. 17.

ⁱ Acts xv. 9.

^k Acts iii. 25, 26.

CXLIX. CHRIST THE TRUE SHILOH.

Gen. xlix. 10. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

THERE was a series of predictions relative to the Messiah from the very beginning of the world; and, as the time for the accomplishment of the prophecies drew near, the predictions concerning him were more particular and minute. About seventeen hundred years before his appearance, the time of his coming was fixed with great accuracy and precision. At the very first moment that the sons of Jacob were made heads of many different tribes, it was foretold, that the continuance of Judah's power should extend beyond that of the tribes, and that the Messiah should arrive before its expiration. In explaining this prophecy we shall of necessity be led to speak of

I. The time of his advent

This, according to the text, was to precede the departure of Judah's sceptre

[Judah is here represented as a lion gorged with his prey,

and couching in his den with a sceptre between his feet; a sceptre, which none should ever wrest from him, until *he* should come, whose right it was^a. "The sceptre" does not import dominion over the other tribes, but only the same kind of separate and independent jurisdiction, which was vested in Dan, and in all the other tribes^b. Nor does the term "law-giver" mean a person who should enact laws; but rather, one who should execute and enforce them. Moses was the only lawgiver of the Jews; and even the kings were required to write a copy of his law, and to obey it in all things. Now it was here foretold, that this particular power should remain with Judah after that the other tribes should have been deprived of theirs; and that it should continue vested in persons belonging to that tribe till the Messiah should come. The precise import of the term "Shiloh" is not certainly known; but it is thought by most to mean, The Peace-maker. All however are agreed that it is a name for the Messiah, whose advent was to precede the dissolution of the Jewish polity.]

The event exactly corresponded with the prediction

[The ten tribes were spoiled of their power when they were carried captive to Assyria. But the tribe of Judah retained both their ecclesiastical and civil polity even in Babylon. If they did not exercise it to the same extent as before, they had by no means wholly lost it. As they had possessed it in Egypt, and retained it the whole time of their Egyptian bondage^c, so they still nominated their priests and elders, yea and appointed fasts and feasts, while they were oppressed with the Chaldæan yoke^d. Their bondage in Babylon was indeed, on the whole, exceeding heavy; but many of them were suffered to build houses and plant gardens, and to live rather as a colony than as slaves^e. On their return from Babylon, their own chiefs and elders were appointed to superintend the execution of Cyrus' decree^f; and, after that period, they continued to enjoy their privileges till the time of our Lord's advent. Soon after that, they were reduced to the state of a Roman province; but still exercised the same powers, only in a more limited manner^g. But, forty years after the death of Christ, when his gospel had been fully preached, and people of all nations had been gathered to him, their city and temple were utterly destroyed; and they themselves were dispersed into all lands. From that time their sceptre has
utterly

^a Ver. 9.

^b Ver. 16.

^c Exod. xxxiv. 31, 32.

^d See Sherlock's 3d Dissertation, p. 346. 6th edition.

^e Jer. xxix. 5, 7.

^f Ezra i. 5, 8.

^g Compare John xviii. 3, and 31.

utterly departed from them; nor can the smallest vestige of their former power be traced. They are therefore *living* proofs throughout the whole world that their Messiah is indeed come.]

The time of Christ's advent being thus clearly ascertained, let us consider

II. The consequences of it

The last clause of the text is by some applied to Judah, to whom the tribe of Benjamin was attached, and the few of the other ten tribes, who returned after their dispersion by the Assyrians, were gathered^h. But the sense of that clause is both more clear, and infinitely more important, as applied to Shiloh. And, if it be understood, as it may well be, as a further limitation of the time beyond which Judah should not retain this power, it will mark, with most astonishing accuracy, the precise period at which his sceptre was to depart.

But, taking it according to its general acceptance, it declares the calling of the Gentiles to the knowledge of Christ

[The scriptures speak much upon this glorious subject. Without noticing the innumerable passages that declare God's intention to convert the Gentiles, we will confine our attention to two or three that speak of it almost in the very same terms as those in the text. Isaiah, representing Christ as standing for an ensign to the people, says, "to him shall *the Gentiles seek*, and his rest shall be gloriousⁱ." There was a remarkable prophecy to the same effect unwittingly uttered by Caiaphas the high-priest. While he designed nothing more than to instigate the Jews to destroy Jesus, God overruled his mind to declare that Jesus should die for the whole world, and should *gather together in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad^k. Our Lord himself also foretelling the same glorious event, said, "I, if I be lifted up, will *draw all men* unto me^l." Nor is only the mere circumstance of their conversion declared in the text; the *manner* also of their coming to him is strongly intimated. They "shall be a willing people in the day of God's power," and as the prophet describes at large, shall fly to him as a cloud, or as doves to their windows^m.]

This part of the prediction also has received, and is daily receiving, its accomplishment

[No

^h 1 Chron. ix. 3.

ⁱ Isai. xi. 10.

^k John xi. 52.

^l John xii. 32.

^m Isai. lx. 3—8.

[No sooner had our Lord given up the ghost, than the Centurion, the first fruits of the Gentiles, was led to acknowledge him as the Son of God. Presently, not Judea only, but the whole Roman empire, was filled with those who were gathered unto him. And, at this moment, "all who are taught of God come unto *him*" as the one foundation of all their hopes, and the only fountain of all their blessings. There is a period still future, when this prophecy shall be fulfilled in its utmost extent; when "all kings shall bow down before him, and all nations shall serve him." Blessed period! may "God hasten it in its time!" may his "gospel run and be glorified," and "his glory fill the earth!"]

Let us now ADDRESS a few words

1. To those who are yet dispersed, and at a distance from the Lord

[How many are there even in this Christian land, who have no more fellowship with Jesus than if he had never come into the world! But what account will they give to him when they shall stand at his tribunal in the last day? Are not the words of our text a direction, as well as a prophecy? Are they not equivalent to an express command? Has not Christ himself enforced this command by repeated invitations and promises, "Look unto me, and be ye saved;" "Come unto me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls?" Has he not even sworn that all shall come to him, or perish for their neglect^a? Why then should we not all gather ourselves around him as in the days of his flesh? Why should not the blind, the lame, the leprous, the possessed, come to him for deliverance? Why should not the poor trembling sinner press through the crowd, and "touch the hem of his garment?" Surely none should find it in vain to come unto him; "Virtue should go forth from him to heal them all." O let the prophecy then receive a fresh accomplishment this day; and may God so "draw us by his Spirit that we may run after him," and abide with him for ever!]

2. Those who, through grace, have been gathered to him

[The sceptre is now passed into the hands of Jesus. He is the true *lion of the tribe of Judah*^o, to whom all power in heaven and in earth has been committed. What then have ye to fear, who are under his protection? Who shall ever pluck you from his hands^p? When, or to whom shall his sceptre ever be transferred? His *mediatorial* kingdom will indeed be put

^a Isai. xlv. 22—25.

^o Rev. v. 5.

^p John x. 28.

put down, when there shall be no more occasion for it¹. But though he will cease to mediate between God and man, his sovereign dominion shall exist to all eternity; “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; of thy kingdom there shall be no end².” Rejoice then, believers, in your Lord; “let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.” Cherish his attractive influences: gather yourselves around him yet daily and hourly: spread before him your every want: commune with him on every occasion: consult him, listen to him; obey him: cleave to him with full purpose of heart; so will he keep you stedfast unto the end, and admit you to the richer fruition of his presence in his kingdom above.]

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 24. This relates to the peculiar mode of administering the affairs of his kingdom *as our Mediator*.

² Isai. ix. 7. Dan. ii. 44. Heb. i. 8.

CL. CHRIST THE STAR SPOKEN OF BY BALAAM.

Numb. xxiv. 15—17. *And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

IT has pleased God on various occasions to make known his will to persons of a very unworthy character; and to shew that his ways and thoughts are not regulated by the vain maxims of human wisdom. He proclaimed to Ahaz the conception of our Emmanuel in the womb of a virgin. To Nebuchadnezzar he revealed the successive destruction of the four great monarchies, and the erection of the Messiah's kingdom on the ruins of them all. Thus, in the passage before us, we are informed, that he declared to Balaam not only his purposes respecting Israel and the nations that surrounded them, but the advent of that glorious person, who, as a star should enlighten, and as a prince should govern, the whole world.

The introduction to this prophecy is not unworthy of our notice

It seems very strongly to characterize the person who delivered it

[When prophecies have been delivered by pious men, they have either been introduced with a plain declaration, "Thus saith the Lord;" or the prefatory observations have been calculated to exalt and glorify God. But Balaam's prediction is ushered in with a pompous exhibition of his own attainments, intended, as it should seem, to wrest from Balak that respect and honour, which he had failed to procure by his preceding prophecies^a.]

It shews us too, in a very awful and convincing light, how much knowledge we may possess, while yet we are utterly destitute of converting grace

[The most highly favoured of God's servants from the beginning of the world had not delivered a clearer prophecy of Christ than that which was uttered by Balaam on this occasion. Nor is it improbable that the expectation which obtained throughout the east, that a prince should arise out of Judea and rule the whole world, was occasioned very much by this prophecy. It is remarkable that the Eastern Magi no sooner saw the supernatural star, than they concluded that this Prince was born, and came immediately to Judea to enquire, Where is he that is *born* King of the Jews? Yet where shall we find a baser character than Balaam's? Having considerable knowledge of the true God, he still continued to use enchantments as a *magician*. He was so *covetous* that he "ran greedily after a reward," and preferred "the wages of unrighteousness" to every consideration, either of duty to God or of love to man^b. His *hypocrisy* was conspicuous from first to last; for in the midst of all his high professions of regard to the will and word of God, he laboured to the utmost to counteract the designs of God, and to reverse his decrees. More *murderous* purposes never were entertained in the heart of man; for it was his most earnest desire to curse all the people of God, and to consign them over to destruction by the sword of their enemies. His last act especially was truly *diabolical*: when he found he could not prevail to destroy their bodies, he
taught

^a There is some little obscurity in the passage, occasioned by the translation. The words "whose eyes are open," in ver. 15. should be, "whose eyes were shut:" and the words "in a trance," which are printed in Italics, should not have been inserted. The former refers to his not seeing the angel, when the ass saw him; and the latter to his falling flat on his face when the angel discovered himself to him. See ch. xxii. 27—31.

^b Jude xi. 2 Pet. ii. 15, 16.

taught their enemies how to tempt them and to destroy their souls^c. After comparing his character with his professions and attainments in divine knowledge, what shall we say? Shall we not tremble for ourselves, lest we should rest in a speculative knowledge of Christ, and fail, after all, of obtaining any saving interest in him? We are elsewhere informed that we may have the gifts of prophecy, of tongues, and of a miraculous faith, and yet be only as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals^d. And our Lord assures us that many will in the last day plead the miraculous works that they have performed, but be dismissed with this humiliating answer, Depart from me, I never knew you^e. Even Judas himself was not, in respect of gifts, behind the very chiefest apostles. Let us then never value ourselves on any discoveries of divine truth, unless we have suitable affections and a correspondent practice.]

The prophecy itself is deserving of particular attention

In its primary sense it must be understood in reference to David

[The immediate intention of Balaam was, to inform Balak "what the Israelites should do unto his people in the latter days." Accordingly he declares that one, like a star for brightness, should arise from among the Jews at a distant period, to sway the Jewish sceptre, and to destroy the kingdoms of Edom and Moab. This was fulfilled in David, who subjugated the Moabites, and slew every male in Edom^f.]

But there can be no doubt of its ultimately referring to Christ himself

[Christ is called in scripture "the Day-star," "the bright and morning star;" nor did ever any one arise with splendor comparable to his. He too sat upon the throne of his father David, and exercised unlimited dominion. The children of Edom and Moab may be justly considered as representing the enemies of his church and people. These he subdues and will finally destroy; not one shall live before him: "he will reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Doubts have arisen whether by "Sheth" we are to understand that son of Adam, whose posterity alone survived the flood; or some person or place of eminence in Moab; (which on the whole is the more probable) but in both senses the prediction was equally fulfilled in Christ, who "has the heathen for his inheritance and the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." HIM then did Balaam see, as Abraham also had seen four hundred years before, but not, alas! with Abraham's joyful hope.

^c Rev. ii. 14.

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^e Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^f 2 Sam. viii. 2, 14. Ps. lx. 8. 1 Kings xi. 15, 16.

hope. Of his victorious career he spake, saying, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh."]

Should not *we* then rejoice, who have seen this prophecy accomplished?

[We have not to look forward at the distance of fifteen centuries; nor yet to travel like the Eastern Magi through trackless deserts to behold the Lord. The star is risen on our benighted world; the kingdom is established on the ruins of Satan's empire: "the Prince of this world is cast out;" and every enemy of our salvation is vanquished. We have only to open our eyes, and we shall see the beams of the Sun of Righteousness: we have only to yield ourselves up to Jesus, and we shall enjoy all the peace and glory of his kingdom. We may see him even now; we may behold him nigh, even in the very midst of us: O that our eyes may behold him, and that we may "see him for ourselves and not for others^g!" Let us improve our privilege: let us pray that this "Day-star may arise in our hearts^h:" and let this monarch so captivate our souls, as to lead us to a willing and unreserved obedience.]

Should we not be thankful too that we have One engaged to vanquish all our enemies?

[This is the work and office of the Lord Jesus; nor will he ever fail in the execution of it. What though we be, like Israel, unarmed and unused to war? The Captain of our salvation is mighty; and "he who hath promised is able also to perform." The promised land is before us, and in vain shall our enemies conspire against us. They may strive to curse; but "there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel:" in due time it shall be said by each of us with wonder and amazement, "What hath God wroughtⁱ!" "Be strong then, brethren, and very courageous." "Believe in the Lord, so shall ye prosper, believe his prophets, so shall ye be established." Even "a worm shall thresh the mountains," for "the Lord our God is with us, and the shout of a king is among us^k." Let "Israel then go forth and do valiantly;" and let the weakest-rejoice in a confident expectation of victory; "for God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent^l."]*

^g Job xix. 27.

^h 2 Pet. i. 19.

ⁱ Numb. xxiii. 23.

^k Numb. xxiii. 21.

^l Ib. 19.

* The division of the subject is omitted, as in a few other instances, in order to shew how all the subjects might be treated without any division at all. But the natural division would be, I. The Introduction to the Prophecy. II. The Prophecy itself. The two concluding sections would form the Improvement.

CLI. CHRIST A LIVING REDEEMER.

Job xix. 25—27. *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.*

THE trials of the saints have not only been eminently conducive to their own good, but also productive of the best effects to the church at large. It is in afflictive circumstances that their graces have shone most bright; and under them they have made the most glorious confessions, which will be recorded with admiration as long as the world shall stand. Of all the calamities which Job endured, there was none more pungent than the uncharitable censures of his friends, which tended to rob him of his only consolation. But he rose superior to them all; and when he could not convince his friends by argument, he made his appeal to God, and wished it to be written for the vindication of himself, and the encouragement of others to the latest posterity. We shall point out

I. The substance of his confession

That Christ is the person spoken of, the very terms here used sufficiently declare

Job speaks of him as then actually “living”

[Doubtless Job was no stranger to the promise made to Adam respecting “the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent’s head;” or to those so often repeated to Abraham, of a “seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” The father of the faithful had anticipated the advent of that promised seed, and had rejoiced exceedingly in seeing, though at the distance of two thousand years, the day in which he should exist^a. But Job seems not only to equal, but even to surpass that most distinguished “Friend of God;” for he saw Christ as actually living; and understood that, which, when spoken by our Lord, so much confounded the Jewish doctors, “Before Abraham was, I am^b.” Yes, Job beheld him in his pre-existent state, seventeen or eighteen hundred years before he became incarnate; he beheld him as having life in himself, and as being the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^c.]

He

^a John viii. 56.

^b Ib. 58.

^c John i. 4. Heb. xiii. 8.

He even declares him to be "God"

[The same person whom he calls "his Redeemer," he afterwards calls "God." And in this he is supported by numberless other testimonies of holy writ. The Evangelical prophet tells us that the very same person who was "a child born, and a son given, was also the Mighty God^d;" and the New Testament assures us that He was "Emmanuel, God with us, even God manifest in the flesh^e." Job was accused of ignorance by his friends; but it is to be feared that they had not by any means such exalted views of Christ as he here exhibits.]

This holy man yet further confesses Christ as "his Redeemer"

[The word *Goel* imports the nearest of kin, in whom the right of redeeming any estate that had been sold was vested^f. Behold then the depths of divine truths which had been revealed to Job! He sees his God incarnate; and himself as "a member of Christ's body, even of his flesh and of his bones^g." He sees Christ redeeming his soul from death and hell; redeeming him at no less a price than his own blood; or to use the words of an apostle, he sees "God purchasing the church with his own blood^h."]

Nor does he view him only as incarnate, or as dying for the redemption of man, but as coming again to judge the world

[The words used by Job might be applied to the incarnation and resurrection of Christ; but they seem rather to designate his appearance in the last day to judge the world. This office is "committed to Christ because he is the Son of man;" and when he shall execute it, "he will come from heaven in like manner as he ascended up to heaven:" He will not indeed any longer be seen in a state of weakness and humiliation, but "in all the glory of his Father and his holy angels:" nevertheless He will then appear "as a lamb that has been slain;" and will summon all those who pierced him to his tribunal.]

But that which gives inexpressible dignity to this confession, is, the full assurance it expresses of *his* rising from the grave in that day to behold and enjoy Christ

[He does not seem to have had any hope of restoration to temporal prosperity; but speaks in the most confident manner of his resurrection to eternal happiness. The destruction of his mortal frame by worms was not in his eyes any bar to its
renovation

^d Isai. ix. 6. ^e Matt. i. 23. ^f 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^g Heb. ii. 11, 14, 15. Eph. v. 30.

^f Lev. xxv. 25.

^h Acts xx. 28.

renovation in the last day. He knew that what was sown in corruption, weakness, and dishonour, should be raised in incorruption, power, and glory; that his vile body should be changed like unto Christ's glorious bodyⁱ; and that when his earthly tabernacle should be dissolved, he had an house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens^k. He knew that, having awaked up after his Redeemer's likeness, he should behold him, not as now through a glass darkly, but face to face, and dwell for ever in his presence where is fulness of joy^l. This re-union of his soul and body, together with the beatific vision of his glorified Redeemer, was the one object of his most earnest desires, and most assured hopes. And he was determined, notwithstanding all the accusations of his friends, to maintain "this rejoicing of his hope firm unto the end."

We shall endeavour to IMPROVE this subject by considering

II. The lessons to be learned from it

Whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning: and this confession in particular suggests to us that

1. A full assurance of hope is attainable in this world

[Job's assurance seems to have been remarkably strong: he not only calls Jesus *his* Redeemer, but proclaims his confident expectation of dwelling with him for ever: he speaks of this, not as a thing which he surmised, or hoped, but as what he "knew" for certain. Now was this a privilege peculiar to Job? Had not Paul also the same delightful confidence, when he said "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day^m;" and again, when he professed that "henceforth there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge should give himⁿ?" And has not the same apostle bidden us all to shew the same diligence to *the full assurance of hope unto the end*^o? Why then should we rest satisfied without attaining this blessed hope? Would it not serve as an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast^p, amidst all the storms and billows of this tempestuous world? Would it not be an effectual antidote to the poisonous breath of calumny, which will ever strive to blast the fairest characters? Will not the testimony of a good conscience fill us with joy even when we are loaded with the bitterest accusations^q? Shall we not say with St. Paul,

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43. Phil. iii. 21.

^k 2 Cor. v. 1.

^l 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 1 John iii. 2. Ps. xvi. 11. and xvii. 15.

^m 2 Tim. i. 12.

ⁿ 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^o Heb. vi. 11.

^p Heb. vi. 19.

^q 2 Cor. i. 12.

Paul, "It is a small matter with me to be judged of you or of man's judgment, yea, I judge not mine own self, but he that judgeth me is the Lord^r?" Seek then to "know your election of God;" strive to make it sure and evident to yourselves^s; and be continually "living a life of faith on the Son of God," that you may be able to say, "He has loved me, and given himself for me^t."]

2. A clear knowledge of Christ in his person and offices is the best groundwork of an assured hope

[Though Job had been too ready to boast of his integrity, it was not on *that* that he founded his hopes of immortality and glory. He knew himself to be under the curse of God's broken law; and that Christ as his Redeemer, was his "deliverer from that curse, having himself been made a curse for him." And what other foundations of hope can *we* have? Are we holier than Job, who notwithstanding all his holiness exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile?" Have we not at least as much reason as he to "abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes^u?" How then shall *we* pretend to be just before God? Let this be firmly settled in our minds, that we must flee to Christ for redemption, before we can know him to be our Redeemer: we must be united to him by faith, before we can claim him as our nearest kinsman: we must behold his glory now as it is exhibited in the glass of the gospel, if we would behold it with joy in the great day of his appearing. Let us then seek to know Christ as he is revealed in the word: let us "search the scriptures, which testify of him," and pray for the illuminating influences of that Spirit, whose office is, to "glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto us." Let us be ashamed that Job, who lived before there was any written record of Christ in the world, should know more of Christ than we, who live in the meridian splendor of gospel light. And, whatever we have attained, let us seek daily to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."]

3. There is no state, however afflictive, wherein an assurance founded on the knowledge of Christ will not support and comfort us

[It is worthy of observation, that from the instant Job uttered these words he was enabled to suppress, in a considerable measure, his bitter murmurings and complaints. And what greater support can any man need than to know that he has Christ for his redeeming God, and that after a few more conflicts he shall enjoy him for ever^x? We do not indeed expect that

^r 1 Cor. iv. 3.

^s 2 Thess. i. 4. 2 Pet. i. 10.

^t Gal. ii. 20.

^u Job xlii. 6.

^x 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

that a person shall always be so elevated by these considerations, as to soar above all sense of his afflictions. But sometimes even this may be enjoyed; and at all times we may hope to "possess our souls in patience, till patience have its perfect work and we be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Let the sons and daughters of affliction then have recourse to this remedy: let them labour to attain a thankful sense that they have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and then they need not fear but that they shall be strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness^y. Let them seek an evidence that they are Christ's: let them beg the Holy Spirit to witness to their spirit that they are children of God; and then their trials, however grievous at the time, shall only serve as a boisterous wind, to waft them more speedily to their desired harbour.]

^y Col. i. 11, 12.

CLII. CHRIST SUPERSEDING THE LEGAL SACRIFICES.

Heb. x. 5—10. *When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. In burnt-offerings, and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure: Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God. Above, when he said, Sacrifice, and offering, and burnt-offerings, and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein (which are offered by the law), Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

THERE is not any important truth contained in the New Testament, which was not before revealed in the Old. But we have an advantage over the Jews, in that the obscurity, which was cast over the language of prophecy, is removed by the interpretations of men divinely inspired to explain the sacred oracles. Hence we are enabled to see, what the Jews could never comprehend, though plainly and repeatedly declared to them, God's determination to abrogate the Mosaic œconomy, in order to make way for the Christian dispensation. This was declared by David, while the law was yet in full force: and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews both quotes

his words in proof of this point, and confirms them by additional declarations to the same effect.

We shall consider

I. The quotation as explained by the apostle

[The Psalm, which the apostle quotes, certainly refers to Christ: for David could not boast of his own obedience as superseding the law; since a compliance with the law constituted a very essential part of his duty ^a.

David, in the words before us, speaks in the person of Christ, supposing him to be just "come into the world," though, in fact, it was a thousand years before his birth. And he represents him as addressing the Father to this effect; that *the sacrifices were designed of God to take away sin: that God had prepared him a body, that he might offer a perfect and sufficient atonement for sin: and that he willingly undertook the office committed to him.*

The insufficiency of the legal sacrifices had continually appeared from the contempt poured upon them in comparison of moral duties ^b, and from the utter abhorrence in which they were held by God himself, if not accompanied with a suitable spirit and conduct in the offerers ^c.

That Christ might have somewhat to offer, God formed him a body in the womb of the virgin: thus, being "the seed of the woman" *only*, and not of man, he was not involved in the guilt of Adam's transgression, nor did he partake of that pollution, which all, born in a natural way, inherit from their first parents: and consequently he was fitted to offer to the Lord a pure and spotless sacrifice ^d.

Fully acquiescing in his Father's will respecting this, he came cheerfully to do it ^e; and when engaged in performing it, he made it "his meat and drink to do it," and even in his
greatest

^a Ps. xl. 6—8. The iniquities of which he speaks in the 12th verse, were Christ's by imputation, Isai. liii. 6. and therefore might justly draw from him that complaint.

^b 1 Sam. xv. 22. Hos. vi. 6. ^c Isai. i. 11—14. and lxvi. 3.

^d The Psalmist's words are, "Mine ears hast thou opened:" which seem to refer to the custom of boring the ear of a servant, who determined to abide in his master's service, Exod. xxi. 5, 6. The apostle's words, though widely different in sound, are nearly the same in sense: they import that Christ, having become incarnate, would never recede from his Father's work, till he could say, "It is finished." The apostle's meaning is precisely expressed, Phil. ii. 6—8.

^e The whole of the Psalmist's words are not cited by the apostle. But the *additional* expressions, Ps. xl. 8. set forth, in a striking point of view, the zeal with which Christ undertook and executed this arduous work.

greatest extremity continued stedfast, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done^f."

This cheerful devotion of Christ to his Father's will, though not so expressly recorded, yet had been intimated from the beginning, and placed, as it were, at the very head of the inspired volume^g.

The apostle's explanation of this passage throws yet further light upon it. He repeats a second time the Psalmist's enumeration of the different kinds of sacrifices, in order to shew, that none (whether those burnt without the camp^h, or those consumed on the altarⁱ, or those, of which but a small part was burnt, and the rest was divided between the priest and the offerer^k) were of any avail to take away sin. He then informs us that the Psalmist's mention of Christ as coming to effect that which the legal sacrifices could not, was *expressly intended by God as an intimation, that the whole Jewish æconomy should be superseded by the Christian*. Similar intimations the apostle notices in other parts of the prophetic writings; and he frequently both quotes them, and draws the same inference from them in other parts of this epistle^l. From hence therefore we may see the very great importance of the passage before us, as manifesting the eternal purpose of God to liberate us from the Jewish yoke, and to establish throughout the world the purer dispensations of the gospel.]

The sense of the passage quoted by the apostle being thus clearly ascertained, let us consider

II. His declaration founded upon it

There are two important points which the apostle deduces from these words of David;

1. That God's will is the true and *only source* of our salvation

[Sanctification imports a setting apart of any thing for God. Hence the tabernacle with all its vessels are said to have been sanctified^m; and Christ himself says, "For their sakes I sanctify myselfⁿ:" and it is in this sense that the term "sanctified" is used in the text^o: it means a separation for God in order to eternal salvation.

Now it is solely from the "will of God" thus made known to his Son, and thus fulfilled by him, that any of the children of men

^f John iv. 34. Luke xxii. 42.

^g Gen. iii. 15.

^h Lev. xvi. 27.

ⁱ Exod. xxix. 38—42.

^k Lev. vii. 1—6, 19. The word "*all*" includes the offerers. See 1b. ver. 15, 16. and Numb. xviii. 11.

^l Heb. viii. 13. and x. 17, 18. and xii. 26, 27.

^m Exod. xl. 10—12.

ⁿ John xvii. 19.

^o Compare ver. 14.

men are made partakers of salvation. It was not possible for any such plan to have originated with any other than God himself. When God's dealings with the fallen angels were considered, who would have imagined that man, partaking of their iniquity, should yet be rescued from their doom? Supposing that such a thought could have entered into the mind of man, who could have contrived such a way of maintaining the honour of the divine government, and of making the discordant attributes of justice and mercy to harmonize in the salvation of man? If such an expedient as the substitution of God's own Son in the place of sinners could have been devised, who could have dared to propose it to the Deity; or have prevailed upon him to acquiesce in it? The more this is considered, the more will the salvation of man appear to be totally independent of man himself (as far as respects the contriving or the meriting of it) and to be the fruit of infinite Wisdom, sovereign grace, and unbounded love^p. From the first laying of the foundation to the bringing forth of the top-stone, we must cry, Grace, grace unto it^q.]

2. That the sacrifice of Christ is the *only means* whereby it is effected

[It might seem that men, under the law, were accepted on account of the sacrifices, which were offered according to the Mosaic ritual. But, not to mention the impossibility that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin^r, the very repetition of those sacrifices shewed their insufficiency for the removal of guilt, or for the satisfying of men's consciences^s. They had no effect but as they led the offerers to the Lord Jesus Christ, or expressed their faith in his all-atoning sacrifice. All who have ever found acceptance with God, whether before the law, or under it, or since its abolition, have been admitted to mercy purely "through the one offering of Jesus Christ." Nothing but that could ever satisfy divine Justice; nothing but that could ever atone for one single sin: nor can any creature, to the end of the world, ever obtain favour with God, but in consideration of that sacrifice presented to God for us, and pleaded by us as the one ground of our hope^t.]

INFER

1. How vain is men's confidence in any services of their own!

[To have been baptized in our infancy, to have attended punctually the outward duties of the sabbath, and to have waited occasionally upon the Lord at his table, are deemed in
general

^p 2 Tim. i. 9.

^r Ver. 1—3. Heb. ix. 9.

^q Zech. iv. 6, 7.

^t Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^s Ver. 4.

general satisfactory evidences of our conversion to God, and sufficient grounds for our hope towards him. But, if the whole multitude of legal institutions, framed by God's own order, and according to a model shewn to Moses in the mount, were of no value as recommending men to God, how much less can the few services which we perform be sufficient to procure us acceptance with him? But it may be said, that moral services are more pleasing to God than ceremonial: true; but we are not told that God willed *them*, any more than the others, *as means of effecting our reconciliation with him*. It was the incarnation and death of Christ that God "*willed*;" and, in a remarkable correspondence with the text, he thrice, by an audible voice from heaven, said, This is my beloved Son *in whom I am well pleased*^a. Let every self-righteous hope then be banished; and let us learn to glory in Christ alone^x.]

2. What encouragement have all to devote themselves to God through Christ!

[We have the united testimony of prophets and apostles that God willeth the salvation of men through the sacrifice of his own Son, and that Christ as willingly offered himself a sacrifice in order to effect their salvation. What more can be wanted but that we go to God in that new and living way, which is so clearly pointed out to us? We can have no doubt of God's willingness to save, or of the sufficiency of that salvation which he has provided for us. Let nothing then keep us back from God: but let us look to Christ as the propitiation for our sins^y, and plead the merit of his all-atoning blood. Thus, sanctifying ourselves in his name, we shall be perfected before God^z; being sanctified also by the Holy Ghost, we shall be acceptable in the sight of God and our Father for ever and ever^a.]

^a Οὐκ εὐδόκησας, ver. 8. with ἐς ᾧ εὐδόκησα. Matt. iii. 17.

^x Gal. vi. 14.

^y 1 John ii. 2.

^z Ver. 14. with Heb. ix. 12.

^a Rom. xv. 16.

CLIII. GOD'S COVENANT ENGAGEMENTS WITH CHRIST AND US.

Ps. lxxxix. 28—35. *My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David.*

IN seasons of deep affliction, when, through unbelief, we are ready to think that God has forsaken and forgotten us, it is well to look back to God's covenant engagements, whereon, as on a rock, we may stand firm amidst the tempest that surrounds us. It was under such circumstances (probably about the time of the Babylonish captivity) that this Psalm was penned. In it the stability of God's covenant is fully declared. The fears and apprehensions of his people, as arising from his *apparent* violation of it, are next delineated: and it concludes with fervent adorations of God, who, notwithstanding all the dictates of unbelief, is worthy to be blessed for evermore.

For the just use, as well as understanding, of the passage before us, we shall

I. Explain it

[There can be no doubt but that the words, in their literal meaning, refer to the covenant which God made with David respecting the continuance of his posterity on his throne^a; and which seemed to be violated, now that both king and people were carried captive to Babylon; but which, in fact, should be accomplished in all its parts; because whatever they might endure for a season, the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh should come.

But there is doubtless a reference to Christ, who is often called David^b. Some of the words originally addressed to David, are expressly declared to refer to Christ chiefly, yea *exclusively*^c. They must be understood therefore as containing God's covenant with Christ.

In

^a 2 Sam. vii. 12—17.

^b Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. Hos. iii. 5.

^c Compare 2 Sam. vii. 14. with Heb. i. 5.

In them we see, first, God's assurances *respecting Christ himself*, that notwithstanding all the troubles he should experience, he should be raised from the dead^d, and have all the kingdoms of the earth for his possession^e.

Next, Christ is assured *respecting his people*, who are his seed^f, that though through infirmity and temptation they may fall into sin, the Father will not utterly abandon them, or finally withdraw his love from them^g. He will not indeed leave them to continue in sin (for that would be incompatible with their salvation^h) but he will chastise them; till they repent and turn from all their transgressions: and thus will he secure them to Christ as his inheritanceⁱ.

The grounds of these assurances are, lastly, specified. These are God's *covenant*, and his *oath*. Having entered into covenant with his Son, he cannot disannul it. Yet, if he were to give up to final destruction any who were Christ's spiritual seed, this covenant would be broken; seeing that some who were given to Christ would perish, and Christ, as far as relates to them, would have died in vain. Moreover, in this, the oath, which (for our consolation) he swore to his Son, would be violated: but, having sworn by his holiness, which is the glory of all his perfections, he never can, nor never will recede. On these grounds therefore the glory of Christ, and the salvation of his people are irrevocably secured.]

Lest however this consolatory passage should be abused, let us

II. IMPROVE it

It evidently teaches us

1. To cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart

[The covenant, whether made with David or with Abraham, was confirmed before of God in Christ^k. Every blessing of the covenant was made over to him as our head and representative, and must be received from him by faith^l. To him therefore must we look for pardon, stability, and everlasting salvation. As to him the promises were made^m, so in him alone are they yea, and Amenⁿ. Let it then be our great care to be found in him^o; and then we may rest assured that nothing shall ever separate us from him^p.]

2. To

^d Compare Isai. lv. 3. with Acts xiii. 34.

^e Luke i. 32, 33. Rev. xi. 15.

^f Isai. liii. 10. Ps. xxii. 30. 1 Pet. i. 23.

^g Isai. liv. 7—10. Jer. xxxii. 40.

^h Heb. xii. 14.

ⁱ John xvii. 11. 1 Pet. i. 5—7.

^k Gal. iii. 17.

^l Col. i. 19. John i. 16.

^m Gal. iii. 16.

ⁿ 2 Cor. i. 20.

^o Phil. iii. 9.

^p Rom. viii. 38, 39.

2. To endure with patience and thankfulness whatever afflictions God may lay upon us

[Part of God's covenant is, to "correct us in measure^a." And, however afflicted any may be, have they any cause to say, that they are corrected beyond measure? Can a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Surely it is far better to be chastened here, than to be condemned with the world hereafter^c. We may all see reason enough for chastisement, if we will but mark our daily and hourly transgressions. Let us therefore not so much as desire God to spare us, provided he see that we need correction for the welfare of our souls; but rather let us kiss the rod^d, and improve it^e, and adore the hand that uses it for our good^f.]

3. To dread sin as the greatest of all evils

[Though at first sight this passage may seem to weaken our dread of sin, yet, in reality, it is calculated to impress us with a holy fear of offending God. The covenant made with Christ does indeed secure the salvation of his people: but does it provide them impunity in sin? No—On the contrary, it engages God to punish sin, yea, to punish it effectually; and never to leave his people under its dominion^g. Is there then room to say, I shall be saved, though I commit sin? No: for either God will "drive it out with the rod of correction," or leave it as an indisputable mark that we never belonged to him at all^h. Let us never then make Christ a minister of sinⁱ; but learn from the very grace that saves us to glorify him by a holy conversation^j.]

^a Jer. xxx. 11.

^c Lam. iii. 39.

^e 1 Cor. xi. 32.

^d Mic. vi. 9.

^f Isai. xxvii. 9.

^g Heb. xii. 10.

^h Rom. vi. 14.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 9, 10.

^j Gal. ii. 17. ^b Tit. ii. 11, 12.

CLIV. CHRIST A STANDARD FOR THE GENTILES.

Isai. xi. 10. *In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.*

THERE is a day, often referred to in the prophetic writings, a day fixed in the divine counsels, which is to be distinguished above all others in the annals of the world. That which will render it so remarkable, is figuratively described in the preceding context, and plainly declared in the words we have just read: it is, in a word, the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ. This, with
its

its consequences to the church of God, are the two points to which we would now direct your attention

I. The conversion of the Gentiles

Christ is here represented as “an ensign,” around which all are to flock

[He is “the rod out of the stem of Jesse^a,” and it is of him that the prophet speaks in the prophecy before us^b. He is erected as a standard in the preaching of the gospel. But a standard is not merely an object to be gazed at: it intimates to all who behold it, that they are in danger from their enemies; that they must fight in their own defence; and that their sovereign invites them to enlist under his banners: It intimates further, that, whatever is necessary to arm them for the combat, or to support them in their warfare, shall be provided for them. Now such an ensign is Christ: He is set up, not merely to awaken the attention of people to himself, but to warn them of the approach of their enemies, and to shew them the only means of preservation. It is not in this warfare as in others, that they who fight expose themselves to dangers, and that they, who decline the combat, are kept in safety: the very reverse of this is true in the spiritual warfare: he who will not fight must perish, whilst all who engage courageously in the contest, shall live for ever.]

By the erecting of this standard the Gentile world shall be converted to God

[Whatever other means be used for awakening sinners, they are all ineffectual for the end proposed. It is the preaching of Christ crucified, and that only, that will ever avail for the quickening of the dead, and the renovating of mankind after the image of their God. And *this* has already met with much success; and, in God’s appointed time, shall effect a change on the whole face of the earth. When Peter first “opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word.” And the great apostle of the Gentiles succeeded in turning thousands from their idols to serve the living God. But we have hitherto seen only the first fruits: the harvest is yet to come: and a glorious harvest it will be: for, when “the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in,” “all the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of Christ;” “there will be but one Lord and his name one;” “and all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest^c.” This is what our Lord himself also has predicted, saying, “I, if I be lifted up (upon the cross, and afterwards

^a Ver. 1.

^b Rom. xv. 12.

^c Rom. xi. 25. Rev. xi. 15. Zech. xiv. 9. Jer. xxxi. 34.

wards in the preaching of the gospel) will draw *all* men unto me^d."]

The godly in all ages having looked forward with earnestness to this event, let us consider

II. The consequences of it to the church

A glorious day will that be for the church of God !
The metaphor being changed,

The prophet calls the church " the rest," or resting-place, of the Deity

[For five hundred years after God had gathered to himself his people out of Egypt, he dwelt, by the symbols of his presence, in a moveable tent. But after David had brought up the ark to Mount Zion, and Solomon had erected a temple there for the residence of the Deity, that place was eminently called " the rest," or resting-place of God^e. But that residence was a mere emblem or shadow of one infinitely dearer to God, namely, the hearts of his people^f. It is in the church, even in the hearts of his contrite ones, that God delights to dwell : it is there alone that he can rest ; it is there alone that he can find any satisfaction.]

This rest of his will be rendered exceeding " glorious" by the conversion of the Gentile world : for *then*

1. The glory of God will be most eminently displayed

[When God revealed himself in the temple of Solomon, he filled it with a glory, which far surpassed all the beauty of the structure, or of the furniture with which it was supplied. But how infinitely brighter a display of his glory will he give to the church, when he shall bring into it myriads of the most abandoned sinners ! How will his power and mercy, his truth and faithfulness shine forth with united splendor, and fill every soul with wonder and amazement ! Then will he indeed " glorify the house of his glory," and " make the place of his feet glorious." Then will the church become " an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations^g."]]

2. The felicity of all the saints will be exceedingly increased

[If it be a joy to the very angels in heaven to behold the conversion of *one* sinner, what will it be to the saints of God to see *all* in every place flying to Christ, in unnumbered multitudes, like a cloud, and flocking to him, with rapidity, like doves to their windows^h ! What acclamations and hosannas will

^d John xii. 32.

^e Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14. 2 Chron. vi. 41.

^f Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

^g Isai. lx. 5, 7, 9, 13, 15.

^h Ib. 8.

will burst forth in every place, the chorus continually swelling, till the whole earth resounds with the praises of its God! What power will then accompany the ministry of the word! What "an unction of the Holy One" will rest on all that hear it! Surely every ordinance will then be as "the house of God, and as the very gate of heaven¹."]

We may SEE from hence

1. What improvement we should make of the preached gospel

[The preaching of the gospel is, in fact, the raising of this standard before the eyes of men: it is the setting forth of Christ crucified, and the calling of men to enlist under his banners. What then have we to do, but to flock around him; to give up our names to him, that they may be inscribed on his list; and to gird ourselves for the combat at his command? Let us then vie with each other in zeal for his service: and let us willingly "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," that, being more than conquerors, we may receive a crown of righteousness at the hands of our righteous Judge^k.]

2. The blessedness of those who improve it aright

[Whoever complies with the invitations of the gospel, and unites himself to the army of saints, the church of God, he instantly becomes a distinguished favourite of heaven; his heart is the temple of the Deity; he is God's residence, he is God's rest: and more glorious is he, than if all earthly dignities were centered in him; more happy, than a combination of all earthly comforts could make him. Let us then aspire after "the good of God's chosen, that we may rejoice in the gladness of his nation, and glory with his inheritance^l."]

¹ Gen. xxviii. 17.

^k 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^l Ps. cvi. 5.

CLV. THE TIME AND ENDS OF CHRIST'S ADVENT.

Dan. ix. 24. *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.*

IT has pleased God on many occasions to manifest his regard to prayer; and to give such speedy and gracious answers to it as should encourage all his people to pour out their hearts before him—Daniel, having understood

by books that the seventy years captivity in Babylon were drawing to a close, set himself by fasting and prayer to implore mercy for himself and his captive nation : and God instantly sent an angel to testify the acceptance of his prayers, and to reveal to him the period fixed for that far greater deliverance, which should in due time be effected by the Messiah—"Seventy weeks," according to the prophetic language, mean seventy weeks of years, that is, four hundred and ninety years, a day for a year^a—Commentators are not agreed respecting the precise year from which the numeration of them begins^b : but according to any calculation the Messiah must have long since come into the world ; and the Jews are inexcusable in rejecting so decisive a testimony—The *ends* of the Messiah's advent are here set forth in a rich variety of expression : they may be reduced to three,

I. To reconcile God and man

The legal dispensation made no effectual provision for this end

[There were sacrifices and various other services appointed for the removal of guilt : and the person who complied with the ordinances prescribed was considered as absolved from his sin—But in the nature of things "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin"—Indeed the annual repetition of the same offerings on the great day of atonement shewed, that the transgressions, which had been before atoned for, were not fully and finally forgiven : these repeated sacrifices were so many "remembrances of sins," intended to lead the minds of men to that greater sacrifice, which alone could "make them perfect as pertaining to the conscience," or procure for them a complete and "eternal redemption^c."]

This however was to be fully accomplished by the Lord Jesus

["What

^a Ezek. iv. 6. There is a remarkable coincidence between the 70 years at the end of which this temporal deliverance was to take place, and the 70 weeks of years when the great deliverer was to come. That space of time (490 years) includes ten Jubilees ; at the last of which, not one nation only, but all the nations of the world should hear the sound of the gospel-trumpet, and be restored to their forfeited inheritance.

^b The more approved calculations are those which are dated from the 7th, or from the 20th, and the latter by lunar years.

^c Heb. ix. 9—12. and x. 1—4.

["What the law could not do, God sent his own Son to effect^d"—"the Messiah was to be cut off, but not for himself^e:" by him divine Justice was to be satisfied, and the handwriting that was against us, being nailed to his cross, was to be for ever cancelled^f: he was so to "finish transgression, and make an end of sin" that no further sacrifice for it should ever be necessary: by his one offering he was to perfect for ever them that are sanctified^g—All this has been done: through the blood of his cross, reconciliation is made between God and man^h: God no more abhors the sinner, seeing that he is cleansed from sin in the Redeemer's blood, and is clothed in that spotless righteousness which Jesus has brought inⁱ: nor does the sinner any longer hate God, because he is enabled to behold him as *his* God and Father in Christ—Thus is the breach completely closed: thus is man restored to the favour and love of God: thus are all typical sacrifices abrogated and annulled^k: and thus are men delivered, no less from the love and practice of sin than from the curse and condemnation due to it^l—Sin is no more remembered on the part of God, nor any more practised on the part of man—]

A further end of the Messiah's mission was

II. To fulfil the scriptures

There were a great variety of types and prophecies which designated the Messiah's work and character

[The first promise, given immediately after the fall, represented him as "the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head"—In process of time other prophecies declared the family from which he should spring, the time and place of his birth, the minutest circumstances of his life and death, together with his subsequent exaltation and glory: moreover the whole nature of his undertaking, the various offices he was to sustain, with all the effects of his mission, were exactly delineated—Besides these, there were also many figurative representations instituted of God for the purpose of exhibiting to the world, as in a shadow, those things which were afterwards to be realized and substantially effected—Our first parents were clothed by God himself with the skins of beasts, which they had before been directed to offer in sacrifice; that, in that type, they might see the only true way of atoning for their sin, or covering their shame from the eyes of God—The various ordinances that were appointed under the Mosaic dispensation, the paschal lamb, whose sprinkled blood averted from

^d Rom. viii. 3.

^g Heb. x. 11—14.

^k Dan. ix. 27.

^e Dan. ix. 25.

^h Col. i. 21, 22.

^l Tit. ii. 14.

^f Col. ii. 14.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 21.

from the Israelites the sword of the destroying angel, while its flesh, eaten with bitter herbs, nourished their bodies; the daily and annual sacrifices, with all the sprinklings and other ceremonies; the habits and services of the priests, the form and furniture of the tabernacle, with many other things, which it would be tedious to enumerate, declared in ten thousand forms the work and offices of the promised Messiah—]

All of these Christ was in the exactest manner to fulfil

[Some parts of the inspired volume represented him as God, others as a man, yea, as “a worm and no man;” some as victorious, others as suffering; some as living for ever, others as dying; some as the priest, others as the sacrifice; some as a sanctuary, and others as a stumbling-block: all manner of opposites were to unite in him as lines in their centre, in order that, when he should appear, there should not exist a doubt in any unprejudiced mind, but that he was the person foretold; and that every thing respecting him had been fore-ordained in the divine counsels—Accordingly when he came, he shewed himself to be that very Messiah, who, like a seal, engraven with strokes infinitely diversified, corresponded exactly with the impression which had been given of it to the church two thousand years before—Thus did he “seal up the vision and prophecy,” completing it in all its parts, and leaving no further occasion for such methods of instruction—]

There was yet one more thing contained in his commission, namely,

III. To pour out the Spirit

“The anointing of the most holy” is generally thought to import that Christ himself should receive the Spirit; but we apprehend that it imports also his communicating of the Spirit to his church

[Christ is certainly “the holy one and the just,” to whom the character of “the most holy” eminently belongs—It is certain also that he was anointed with the Spirit from his very first designation to preach the glad tidings of salvation^m; and that he received a further unction when the Spirit descended upon him in a bodily shape like a doveⁿ—But these do not appear to be the seasons alluded to in the text: the unction there spoken of seems to follow the other ends of his mission; and consequently to relate to something which took place after his ascension to heaven—The Psalmist speaks of Christ after his ascension, and consequent inauguration, when he says, “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore God,

^m Isai. lxi. 1.

ⁿ Matt. iii. 16.

God, thy God, hath *anointed thee with the oil of gladness* above thy fellows." In another Psalm he declares the same truth in still plainer terms; "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast *received gifts for men*, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them^p." By consulting the apostle we shall find that this gift which Jesus then received, was, the holy Spirit; and that he received it in order that he might communicate it to his church; for, quoting this very passage, he alters one word in it, and says, "*he gave gifts unto men*;" and then adds, that he gave these "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ^q." But the testimony of another apostle is absolutely decisive on this point: while St. Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down upon all the apostles, and abode on each of them in the shape of cloven tongues of fire: the apostle then declared that this was an accomplishment of Joel's prophecy respecting "the pouring out of God's Spirit;" and referred them to Jesus as the author of it, and as having received, *at this time*, the gift of the Spirit for this very end; "therefore, says he, being exalted by the right hand of God, and *having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost*, Jesus hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear^r—Thus was this holy oil poured out upon the head of our great High Priest, that it might flow down to the skirts of his garments, and reach to the meanest of his members^s—]

TO IMPROVE this subject we may observe

1. What abundant provision has God made for our salvation!

[What can we conceive either as necessary or desirable beyond what our blessed Redeemer has done for us? What could the most guilty and abandoned sinner upon earth desire more of Christ, than that he should "finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, bring in for him an everlasting righteousness, and anoint him" with that same Spirit wherewith he himself is "anointed without measure^t?"—Or what evidence of his ability and willingness to do these things would any man have, beyond what the accomplishment of so many types and prophecies affords him?—And shall God do so much for us, and we do nothing for ourselves? Yea, shall God freely offer us this glorious salvation, and we not deign to receive it?—O let us open our eyes, and behold our truest interest: let us not perish in the midst of mercy; let

us

^p Ps. xlv. 7.

^q Ps. lxxviii. 18.

^r Eph. iv. 8, 11, 12.

^s Acts ii. 3, 16, 33.

^t Ps. cxxxiii. 2.

^u John iii. 34.

us not be famished when so rich a feast is set before us^a; but let us comply with the Saviour's invitation, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved x"—]

2. How deeply are we interested in obtaining the knowledge of Christ!

[When the apostles were asked by our Lord whether they also intended to forsake him, Peter well replied, "Lord, whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life"—Thus must we say; for assuredly "there is salvation in no other; there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ^y"—In vain will be all our self-righteous endeavours to reconcile ourselves to God, or to renew our polluted hearts—"If Christ wash us not, we have no part with him^z:" if he put not away our sins, they must abide upon us for ever: if he do not impart to us that "unction of the Holy One, whereby we know all things^a," and "can do all things^b," we must perish in our impotency, even as new-born infants that are left to themselves—Shall we then be regardless of the Saviour, and "perish for the lack of knowledge," when God is thus labouring to instruct us?—Shall we not rather, like Daniel, pray day and night that we may obtain a clearer knowledge of his will?—Let us, O let us "give earnest heed to the things that are spoken;" and treasure up in our minds that truth of God, which alone can sanctify us, which alone can save us—]

^a Isai. xxv. 6.

^x Song v. 1.

^y Acts iv. 12.

^z John xiii. 8.

^a 1 John ii. 20.

^b Phil. iv. 13.

CLVI. SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH'S ADVENT.

Joel ii. 28—32. *And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days, will I pour out my Spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.*

IT is much to be regretted that the obscurities which occur in the prophetic writings (especially those of the lesser prophets) deter many from reading so large a portion

tion of the inspired volume. If there are some parts hard to be understood, there are other parts plain and highly instructive : and the very figures, which from their boldness and sublimity appear intricate, will be found easy and intelligible, through the light reflected on them in the New Testament—The passage before us would, on a cursory perusal, be deemed incapable of any sober construction, or, at least, of any proper application to ourselves : but it plainly declares to us

I. The signs of the Messiah's advent

Numberless were the signs by which the world were taught to know the true Messiah : we here notice only two ;

1. The effusion of his Spirit for the conversion of his elect

[The Spirit in preceding ages had been given to those of the Jewish nation only, and to but few even of those, and in a scanty measure ; but was “ afterward,” that is, in the times of the Messiah, to be “ poured out” abundantly, on Gentiles as well as Jews, and without any distinction of *age*, *sex*, or *quality*, the meanest as well as the greatest being chosen to participate this benefit—This was literally fulfilled, as St. Peter affirms, on the day of Pentecost^a. We must not however limit the operations of the Spirit to the imparting of miraculous gifts : the terms used by the prophet import, that they who should receive the Spirit should be *so* instructed in the mind and will of God, as to be led to “ call on” the Messiah, and enjoy “ the deliverance” which he was coming to effect—Nor must the prophecy be confined to the apostolic age ; for St. Peter also testifies that the promise is to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call^b—]

2. The execution of judgments for the punishment of his enemies

[As an apostle has explained the former part of the text, so has our Lord himself that which now presents itself to our view^c—The immediate subject, to which these figurative expressions refer, is the destruction of Jerusalem : nor, whether we consider the prodigies that accompanied the siege^d, or the devastation and bloodshed occasioned by the Roman armies,

are

^a Acts ii. 16—21.

^b Comp. Acts ii. 39. with the words immediately following the text.

^c Matt. xxiv. 7. 29. and Luke xxi. 11, 25.

^d See Doddridge's note on Acts ii. 19.

are they too strong to represent the scenes which occurred in that devoted city—But those calamities were only shadows of infinitely heavier judgments that shall fall on the ungodly in the last day^e—Then, while “the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth and the works also that are therein are burnt up,” will all the contemners of the Messiah wail because of his wrath and fiery indignation^f—It is indeed in the former sense only that this can be a sign to convince the world at present; but in the latter sense it will hereafter be a demonstration to the whole universe, that all which had been spoken of Christ was true—]

To encourage an earnest expectation of the Messiah, the prophet declares

II. The blessedness of those that believe on him

The subjects of the Messiah's kingdom are characterized as “calling upon his name”

[To call upon Christ is, to give him all that honour and worship that are due to the Supreme Being—This was done by the first martyr, Stephen, and by all the Christian church^g—It was that which rendered them so odious to the Jews^h, and so distinguished among the Gentilesⁱ—And, at this hour, it justly describes all those who are endued with the Spirit—All, without exception, regard Christ as the only source of life and salvation, and depend on him for daily supplies of grace and strength: “the life which they now live in the flesh, is altogether by faith in the Son of God”—]

Nor shall any of that description ever experience the calamities that were foretold as coming on the ungodly world

[The “deliverance” mentioned in the prophecy before us, doubtless referred primarily to the escape of the Christians from Jerusalem, while the Jews, hemmed in on every side, were reduced to the greatest miseries—But we must extend our views to a more important deliverance, even from sin and Satan, from death and hell: it is from these that the sincere follower of Christ will be saved, while all who reject him will perish under the displeasure of an incensed God—In this view

St.

^e Our Lord so blends the two events together in Matt. xxiv. that it is not always easy to determine to which of the two his expressions are to be referred.

^f 2 Pet. iii. 10. with Rev. 1. 7.

^g Acts vii. 59. and 1 Cor. i. 2. ^h Acts ix. 14, 21.

ⁱ Pliny, in his letter to the Emperor Trajan, stating for his information the conduct of Christians, says, “they met on certain days before it was light to sing an hymn to Christ as God.”

St. Paul quotes the very words before us, expressly applying them to Christ as the object of our worship, and confining the blessings of salvation to those who call upon him^k—At the same time we must observe that none who comply with this direction are excluded: “*Whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord,” whatever he may have been, or whatever he may have done in times past, provided he call in sincerity and truth, shall find the Lord rich in mercy towards him—]

This subject will be found of USE

1. To confirm our faith against the cavils of infidels

[There have been in every age some, who have rejected Christianity as a cunningly devised fable—But we would ask, Was the effusion of the Spirit predicted? or could the accomplishment of that prediction be counterfeited? Was the destruction of Jerusalem foretold? Did Jesus apply the very words of our text to that event, and declare that they should be accomplished before that generation should pass away? And did this also happen within the time specified, attended with such prodigies as strictly corresponded with the terms of this prophecy?—Then Christianity must be of divine original; Jesus must be the true Messiah; and salvation must be, as he has declared, through faith in him—Let us then “never be moved away from the hope of the gospel,” but “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”—]

2. To vindicate our experience against the calumnies of scoffers

[St. Peter adduces this passage in vindication of those who had received the miraculous influences of the Spirit; and asserts that, what was profanely imputed to intoxication, was indeed a fulfilment of the words of Joel—Thus scoffers of the present day deride all pretensions to the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and, without any candid examination, impute them to folly or hypocrisy—Our professions of faith in Christ, our simple dependence on him, and assured hope of salvation by him, are also deemed enthusiasm—But if we can say, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,” or by Peter, or by any other inspired writer, we need not regard their calumnies—If it was said to the apostles, Ye are drunk, we may be contented to have it said of us, Ye are fools—Let us then seek more and more earnestly the operations of the Spirit, and be daily calling on the Lord Jesus for grace and mercy: so shall our experience accord with the sacred oracles, and our deliverance be completed, when the sufferings of infidels and scoffers shall commence—]

^k Rom. x. 12, 13.

CLVII. THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S ADVENT.

Mal. iii. 1—3. *Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple: even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers sope. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.*

THE goodness and long-suffering of God are often made an occasion of profane derision and atheistical contempt—Because he does not instantly interpose to vindicate the honour of his injured Majesty, many will deny his interference in the concerns of men, and his determination to punish sin in a future world—We are assured that such scoffers will be found in the latter days, who will insultingly cry, “Where is the promise of his coming^a?” And such there have been in every age and place—In the days of Malachi there were many who “even wearied God” by their impious language: they said, that God delighted in the wicked as much as in the good; and denied that he would ever put any difference between them; “Where,” said they, “is the God of Judgment^b?”—It was in answer to that question that the Lord Jesus Christ inspired the prophet to announce his advent in the flesh, and to declare the discriminating effects that should be produced by it—

Let us notice what he says respecting

I. Our Lord's advent

Jesus is here described under the most august titles

[He is “the Lord,” the supreme ruler and governor of heaven and earth, “the Lord of all^c,” even “Lord of lords, and King of kings^d”—Yet, notwithstanding his equality with the Father as God, he “assumes the form of a servant,” and comes as “the Messenger of the covenant”—He made a covenant with the Father for us, and himself became “the surety of that covenant^e,” pledging himself to God, that our part should be

^a 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

^d Rev. xvii. 14.

^b Mal. ii. 17.

^e Heb. vii. 22. and viii. 6.

^c Acts x. 36.

be performed, and to us also, that God's part should be fulfilled—This covenant he confirmed and ratified with his own blood^f; and he “calls us into the bonds of it,” assuring us, that it is “ordered in all things and sure,” and that all the blessings of it shall be imparted to those, who believe in him—In this office he was “an object of desire and delight” long before he came into the world: He was “the desire of all nations^g :” not indeed that all actually sought and delighted in him; but he was the joy of all that knew him; they who saw his day, though at ever so great a distance, rejoiced in it^h; and if all the earth had known his office and character, they would have been like-minded with those, who “waited for him as the consolation of Israel,” and “looked for redemption in Jerusalemⁱ”—]

The circumstances of his advent also are minutely foretold

[He was to be preceded by an herald, or harbinger, who was to announce his speedy approach, and “to prepare” the minds of men for his reception—This messenger was John, who had the distinguished honour of pointing him out as that very “Lamb of God, who should take away the sin of the world^k”—

The temple was the place to which in a more especial manner he was to come: and thither he was brought at the purification of his mother, when that holy patriarch took him up in his arms, and blessed God for permitting him thus to embrace the promised Saviour^l—It was at the temple that his parents found him conversing with the doctors when he was but twelve years of age: and, when his mother expressed the sorrow that she and her husband had felt while seeking him, he answered, (doubtless in reference to this and similar prophecies) “Wist ye not, that I must be at my Father's^m?”—It was in the temple that he delivered many of his instructive discourses, and wrought many stupendous miracles, and he repeatedly purged it from the profanations which the venal priests had allowedⁿ—

His advent, however, though so long predicted, was to be “sudden,” as in fact it was: for though there was then a general expectation of his arrival, yet the manner of his appearance was so contrary to the carnal notions which were entertained respecting him, that he was overlooked; and, instead of being welcomed as the Messiah, was rejected as an impostor—

The repetition of this prediction in the close of the verse was intended to evince its certainty—]

The

^f Luke xxii. 20. 1 Cor. xi. 25.

^h John viii. 56.

^k John i. 23, 29.

^m *Ἐν τοῖς τῷ πατρὶς μου.*

^g Hag. ii. 7.

ⁱ Luke ii. 25, 38.

^l Luke ii. 27—29.

ⁿ Matt. xxi. 12, 13, 14, 23.

The prophet, having thus foretold the Messiah's advent, proceeds to declare

II. Its diversified effects

As the characters of those, to whom he was to come, were very various, so his advent was to prove

1. Discriminating

[Many in that and every age have professed a great regard for the law of God, while they have really hated it in their hearts, and have shewn their utter enmity to God under the semblance of zeal for his honour—On the other hand, many, who have been despised of their fellow-creatures on account of some enormities they may have committed, have really possessed a broken and contrite heart, and have proved incomparably more willing to submit to Jesus, than any self-applauding Pharisee ever was—Now to discover these hidden dispositions of the heart was one intent of our Lord's coming: "He was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against, *that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed*."—And this was the very effect produced by him; for the Scribes and Pharisees, filled with a conceit of their superior knowledge and goodness, cast him out with abhorrence, while many publicans and harlots believed on him to the saving of their souls—This very effect also still follows from the preaching of his gospel; the precious are separated from the vile, and men, though unconscious of it themselves, are led to manifest their real characters, as careless Gallios, atheistical scoffers, proud Pharisees, or humble believers—]

2. Destructive

[A "refiner's fire" will consume the dross, and "fullers' sope" will destroy the filth, of that to which it is applied: so will our Lord eventually destroy many of those to whom he comes; He will prove to them no other than "a stumbling-block and a gin and a snare"^p—When he appeared in the days of his flesh, how many were there that could not "stand" the trial! their prejudices were excited, their enmity called forth, their hearts hardened, their sins multiplied—Thus it is also in this day: Christ comes, in the preaching of his gospel, and "sits as a refiner and purifier of silver:" but do all, to whom his word is preached, approve themselves to be pure gold? Would to God that this were the case! But, alas! the greater part shew themselves to be but "reprobate silver," or mere dross; who, instead of being purified and rendered "meet for their

^p Luke ii. 34, 35.

^p Isai. viii. 14.

their Master's use," are only "as vessels of wrath, fitted for everlasting destruction"^a—]

3. Purifying

[Some there were in our Lord's day, who, the more they were rubbed with the fullers' sope, and heated by the refiner's fire, were the more freed both from their *outward* filthiness and their *inward* depravity: the apostle tells us of many, who, having once abandoned themselves to the most infamous lusts, were "washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God"^r—So at this time many of the "sons of Levi," not ministers only, but people also (for all believers are now "priests unto God") are "purified as silver and gold, and offer to the Lord their offerings in righteousness"—And it is no small consolation to them to know, that, while they are in the furnace, the refiner himself "sitteth" over them, watching the process with all due solicitude, and taking care that they shall lose nothing but their dirt and dross—]

Let two QUESTIONS close this interesting subject

1. What reception have you given to Christ since his first coming?

[Ministers are sent, like John, to prepare his way; they are "a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert an high-way for our God"—Let me then ask, Are you "seeking this Lord?" are you "delighting in him as the messenger of the covenant?" Do you open your hearts to him as "his temple," and invite "the king of glory to enter in?"—Are you welcoming him even under the character of a refiner, and saying, Put me, Lord, into any furnace, so that I may but come out of it purified as gold?—Is it your one desire and endeavour to offer unto him your offerings in righteousness? and do the sacrifices of prayer and praise ascend up daily from the altar of your hearts, enflamed by fire that you have received from heaven?—This, this is the reception which he should meet with; God grant that he may be thus precious to all our souls!—]

2. What preparation have you made for his future advent?

[It is no less certain that He will come again, than that he has already come—Nor will his advent be less "sudden" than at his first arrival: yea rather, as Noah's flood, it will come wholly unexpected by the world at large^s—"But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?"—That will be a discriminating day indeed: all

^a Rom. ix. 22.

^r 1 Cor. vi. 11.

^s Matt. xxiv. 37—39.

all that have ever lived will have "the counsels of their hearts made manifest;" and the tares shall then be separated from the wheat, and the sheep from the goats—Alas! How will his fire then burn up the ungodly^t! and how strict a scrutiny must every one undergo, before he shall be finally approved^u! Brethren, are ye ready? Are ye "prepared to meet your God?" Have ye been so purified from the love of sin, that ye are now "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?"—Are ye so "seeking and delighting in Jesus" now, that ye can give up your account to him with joy and not with grief?—O say not, Where is the God of judgment? Think not that he delighteth in any who commit iniquity: but know that "he will come even as a thief in the night;" and that it is to those only who look for him, that he will appear to their everlasting salvation^x.—]

^t Compare Mal. iv. 1. Nah. i. 6. Rev. vi. 15—17.

^u 1 Cor. iii. 13, 14.

^x Heb. ix. 28.

CLVIII. THE IMPORT OF THE NAMES GIVEN TO CHRIST.

Matt. i. 21—23. *Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for He shall save his people from their sins. (Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.)*

THE dispensations of Providence are extremely dark and intricate—

The things which appear most afflictive often prove to be the richest mercies that could have been vouchsafed to us—

This was remarkably verified in the history before us—

Joseph was espoused to a virgin of consummate piety—

But, before their nuptials, she proved to be in a state which gave him reason to suspect her fidelity—

Desiring to exercise all the lenity which the case would admit of, he determined to put her away privily—

How distressing must such a state have been to this holy man!—

But God sent an angel to unfold to him the mystery, to declare the ends for which the child should be born,

and to impose on the infant a name, that should mark his office in the world.

I. The appointment of the name

God had often condescended to assign names to men

[Sometimes he had made an alteration in their names^a; and sometimes totally changed them^b—

Sometimes he had assigned a name before the child was conceived^c—

In these things he always acted with unerring wisdom—

When men have attempted to give significant appellations, they have only manifested how ignorant they were of futurity^d—

But God sees all things from the beginning to the end—

And his designation of Christ's name was a prognostic of his character—]

The appellation given to the virgin's son was peculiarly suitable

[“Jesus” simply means *a Saviour*^e; and was a common name among the Jews—

It was sometimes assigned to those who were great deliverers^f—

It had been given in a peculiar manner to the son of Nun^g—

He was eminently a Saviour, as leading the Israelites into the promised land, which Moses was not permitted to do^h—

But Christ, whom he typified, is a far greater deliverer—

He “does that for us which the law could not doⁱ”—

He leads the true Israel of God into their heavenly Canaan—]

So remarkable an event may justly lead us to enquire into

II. The reason of that appointment

Waving all other reasons, we notice two before us

1. To fulfil a prophecy

[Isaiah

^a Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah.

^b Jacob to Israel.

^c John, Luke i. 13.

^d Eve named her first child, “Cain,” which signifies, *getting*; thinking perhaps that she had now gotten the promised seed: having probably soon discovered her mistake, she called her second son “Abel,” which signifies, *vanity*. But how misnamed were both! *This* proved a martyr for his God; and *that*, a murderer of his own brother.

^e Acts xiii. 23.

^f Neh. ix. 27.

^g Numb. xiii. 16. Which name is precisely the same with “Jesus,” and is so translated Acts vii. 45. and Heb. iv. 8.

^h Deut. i. 37, 38.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 3. Acts xiii. 39.

[Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah should be called Emmanuel^k—

From the event it appears, that God did not intend this prophecy to have a *literal* accomplishment—

We may expect however that *the spirit of it* should be accomplished—

Now the name “Jesus” was in fact equivalent to Emmanuel—

“Jesus” means “divine Saviour;” and Emmanuel, God with us^l—

And the evangelist himself tells us, that the imposition of *that* name was in order to the fulfilment of *this* prophecy^m—]

2. To declare the infant's office and character

[The virgin's child was to be the Saviour of the world—

He was to save his people *by price*, and *by power*—

They were under sentence of eternal condemnation—

His life was the ransom to be paid for their soulsⁿ—

Hence they are called his purchased possession^o—

They were also in bondage to sin and Satan^p—

And he was to make them a peculiar people, zealous of good works^q—

Yea, he was ultimately to place them beyond the reach of all the penalties and pollutions of sin—

It was of importance that this great work should be represented in his very name—

And the text informs us that the name was given him for this very purpose—]

INFER

1. How precious ought the name of Jesus to be to all his followers !

[What benefit can be bestowed like salvation from sin ?—

A deliverance from its dominion is an unspeakable blessing—

The godly desire it no less than deliverance from hell itself—

And how delightful is pardon *to a burthened conscience* !—

How sweet is a sense of God's favour *in a dying hour* !—

What joy must the glorified soul possess *in the day of judgment* !—

Yet Jesus has bought it all with his own most precious blood—

He

^k Isai. vii. 14.

^l See Bp. Pearson on the Creed, p. 70, 71.

^m Matt. i. 22, 23.

ⁿ Matt. xx. 28.

^o Eph. i. 14. See also 1 Cor. vi. 20. and 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^p Luke xi. 21. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^q Tit. ii. 14.

He has bestowed it freely on all his faithful followers—

He will impart it liberally to all who will believe on him—

Is there not reason then for that divine anathema^r?—

Will not the very stones cry out against those who refuse to praise him?—

Let Jesus then be precious to us all—

Let us adopt the grateful strains of that sweet Psalmist of Israel^s—]

2. How vain is it to expect salvation in the ways of sin!

[Sinners seem to entertain but little fear about their souls—

They even encourage one another to commit iniquity with greediness—

But they cannot possibly be saved in such a state—

If they could, the angel should have assigned a very different reason for the appointment of Jesus' name^t—

In that case, Christ would have been a minister of sin—

But who must not, with the apostle, express his abhorrence of such a thought^u?—

Our Lord has plainly told us what shall ere long be his address to self-deceiving sinners^x—

Let us then “flee for refuge to the hope set before us”—

And tremble lest we provoke *the Saviour* to become our *destroyer*—]

^r 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^s Ps. ciii. 1—4.

^t He should rather have said, “He shall save his people **IN** their sins.”

^u Gal. ii. 17.

^x Matt. vii. 23.

CLIX. CHRIST'S ADVENT A GROUND OF JOY.

Ps. xcvi. 1—9. *O sing unto the Lord a new song, for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory. The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice and sing praise. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord the King. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before*

before the Lord: for He cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

THE Psalms are generally read as the effusions of a devout mind, whilst their reference to Christ is almost entirely overlooked—This, which is now under our consideration, like the 96th with which it accords, confessedly relates to Christ: the very language of ver. 3. is used by Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, in the divine hymns whereby they celebrated his advent in the flesh^a—It contains

I. Some grounds and matter for our joy

In the three first verses the Psalmist describes in figurative expressions, and in the last verse he expressly specifies, the proper ground of our joy

The incarnation of Christ seems to be the subject here referred to

[Christ is “the LORD” Jehovah, “the King” of kings, and Lord of lords, who “is come to judge the earth,” and to exercise dominion, not, like the judges of Israel, over one nation only, but over all the nations of the world—Nor under his government will any partiality be shewn either to Jews or Gentiles; on the contrary, it is administered “with perfect righteousness and equity:” his laws are *equally* binding on the rich and poor: his invitations are *equally* extended to the most abandoned sinner, and the most decent moralist: his benefits are *equally* conferred on all according to their attainments in holiness; and his judgments will be inflicted with *equal* severity on the proudest monarch and the meanest beggar—With him is no respect of persons; and whatever difference he may put between one man and another in this life, he will manifest at last, that, though clouds and darkness were round about him, righteousness and judgment were the basis of his throne—]

This is indeed a ground for the most exalted joy

1. It is the most “marvellous” occurrence that ever the world beheld

[That God should be manifested in human flesh, in order to redeem his enemies from destruction, and to purchase to himself a church with his own blood! great indeed is this mystery of godliness: it has heights and depths that can never be explored—]

2. It

^a Luke i. 54, 55, 72. and ii. 30—32.

2. It is the one mean of "victory" over death and hell

[Satan, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, had usurped dominion over the whole race of man, which he would have retained for ever, if God himself had not interposed to rescue us from our sore bondage—But how should even God himself effect this great deliverance? No way was found, but for God himself to take our nature, and become our substitute—What joy then should not the execution of this plan excite in our hearts!—]

3. It opens salvation to a ruined world

[By this was "made known" the way of "righteousness and salvation" through a vicarious sacrifice: nor was it any longer set forth in types, but "*openly*," in plain explicit declarations; and *that*, not to the house of Israel only, but "in the sight of the heathen"—How should *we* benighted Gentiles rejoice in this!—]

4. It is the richest display of God's "mercy and truth"

[It was in this incomprehensible mystery that "mercy and truth" met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other—When the incarnation of Christ was first promised to the world, it was a most stupendous act of *mercy*: after that, the accomplishment of it was an exhibition of *truth* and faithfulness: yea, it was virtually, the substance of all the types, the completion of all the prophecies, the consummation of all the promises—Who must not rejoice in it?—]

After stating such grounds for joy, we may add with confidence

II. An exhortation to rejoice

The animated exhortation of the Psalmist imports that

1. We should feel an interest in this great event

[It is by no means sufficient to acknowledge Christ in a mere speculative manner; we should consider ourselves as the subjects of his kingdom, and seek to participate the blessedness of his people—Let us then enquire, not merely whether we believe that Christ came into the world, but whether we have been filled with wonder at his "marvellous" condescension? Let us ask ourselves whether "his right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory" over our rebellious hearts? Whether "he have made known" to *us* the sufficiency of "his righteousness," and the excellency of "his salvation?" and whether "his mercy and truth" have been magnified in the forgiveness

forgiveness of our sins, and in our renovation after his divine image?—All our pretences to joy will be vile hypocrisy, if we have not experienced, in some measure at least, these triumphs of his love, these victories of his grace—]

2. We should express our gratitude for it

With frequency

[It is not at one particular season only that we should call these things to remembrance, but frequently, yea, continually; since we every moment reap the benefits of Christ's administration—As the fire that burnt upon the altar was never suffered to go out, so neither should the flames of love and gratitude ever be extinguished in our hearts—]

With fervour

[With what energy does the Psalmist repeat and diversify his exhortations to rejoice! Shall we then be contented to offer to our Lord a few cold and languid acknowledgments? No: we should make melody in our hearts unto him; we should even shout for joy—What if the world accuse us of enthusiasm? shall we relax the tone of Christian joy for *them*; or bring down the injunctions of heaven to the standard of *their* religion? Let the angels or glorified saints be blamed for carrying their exultations to excess, would they regard it, and compliment their accusers at the expense of duty?—We plead not indeed for any thing that is extravagant and foolish; but if we can obtain more of heaven in our hearts, and manifest it more in our lives, let us not be afraid or ashamed to do it—]

With unanimity

[The Psalmist calls, not only upon all the human race, but even upon the whole inanimate creation, to join in songs of praise and thanksgiving—And how lamentable is it that there should be found a creature upon earth, a rational and redeemed creature, that is indisposed for this exercise!—O let us all be of one heart and mind: let us sing, rejoice, and give thanks: let our harps no longer be hung upon the willows, or struck in commendation of carnal joys; but let them be tuned in honour of our incarnate God; let us celebrate upon them Messiah's praise—Thus shall even now our joy be unspeakable and glorified, a preparation for glory, an antepast of heaven—]

CLX. OUR DUTY ARISING FROM THE ADVENT OF CHRIST.

Isai. lx. 1. *Arise, shine ; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.*

THE prophetic style is wonderfully sublime: its figures are so bold, its transitions so quick, its descriptions so animated, that all the most admired compositions of Greece and Rome sink in our estimation when compared with the sacred oracles—The writings of Isaiah in particular justify this remark; and both the chapter, and the very words, before us, are worthy of notice in this view—The prophet had just foretold the advent of the Redeemer^a; and instantly, passing over an interval of seven or eight hundred years, he sees his prediction, as it were, accomplished; and calls upon the church, in terms of joyful congratulation, to approve itself worthy of so great a blessing—

In discoursing on his words we shall consider

I. The tidings here announced

Christ is the fountain of light to the whole universe

[He is “the LORD” JEHOVAH, “in whom dwells all the fulness of the godhead”—Though as the Son of man, he laboured under all the sinless infirmities of our nature; yet, as the Son of God, he was “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person”—From him proceeds a lustre, as from the sun in the firmament—But though “he shines in the darkness, the darkness does not apprehend his light^b”—It is the church alone that truly receives him—*That* is, like Goshen in the midst of Egypt, light, whilst all around it is in gross darkness—If any have the light of his word, they cannot profit by it, unless their eyes be opened by his good Spirit—Hence the prophet, speaking of him to the church, says emphatically, “*Thy light is come*”—]

This light is risen upon the church of God

[Under the Jewish dispensation “the day began, as it were, to dawn; and in the hearts of some the day-star had arisen^c”—But at the incarnation of Christ, and in the days of his ministration upon earth, the sun arose above the horizon—In the apostolic age it shone in its meridian splendour; and, through

^a Isai. lix. 20. That the passage refers to Christ, and not merely to the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, will be seen by comparing Isai. ix. 2. with Matt. iv. 16.

^b John i. 5.

^c Exod. ix. 26. and x. 21—23.

^d 2 Pet. i. 19.

through the goodness of God, it has at last visited these distant regions^e—In some respect it shines clearer upon us than even on the apostles themselves; since they, for several years after our Lord's ascension, did not see that the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles was to be broken down: whereas we, who are Gentiles, not only know this truth, but are "grafted on that stock, from which the Jews themselves have been broken off"—]

These tidings are indeed joyful: but, that they are to have a practical effect upon us, we see by

II. The exhortation grounded upon them

In the margin of our Bibles the word "shine" is translated "be enlightened." This translation suggests so important a thought, a thought so naturally arising from the tidings announced, that we may well give it a distinguished place in this part of our subject—The exhortation then may be considered as twofold;

1. "Arise, and be enlightened"

[Notwithstanding "the true light now shines," the greater part even of the Christian world are covered with gross darkness^f—We set before them the light, but they "love darkness rather than light," and desire that we would "make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before them"^g—But we should come forth from our dungeons, and behold this sun of righteousness^h—We should beg of God to bring us "out of darkness into his marvellous lightⁱ," and to "shine into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ^k"—If we continue blind it is our own fault: we take part with Satan against Christ, and, as the recompence of our wickedness, "the god of this world is permitted to blind us^l," and we are given over to a delusion to believe a lie^m—Since then "the day-spring from on high hath visited us," let us no longer "sit in darkness and the shadow of death," but improve the mercies we enjoy, that "our feet may be guided into the way of peace"—]

2. "Arise, and shine"

[The sun in the firmament irradiates the stars, which shine with a lustre derived from him—Thus are we also to "shine as lights in the worldⁿ," and, to reflect the light of the sun of righteousness—As the face of Moses, when come down from the

^e Mal. iv. 2. Luke i. 78, 79.

^g John iii. 19. Isai. xxx. 11.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^m 2 Thess. ii. 11.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 6.

ⁿ Phil. ii. 15.

^f Ver. 2.

^h Isai. xlix. 9.

^l Ib. ver. 4.

the mount, shone, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold him^o, so should all of us, though with a less dazzling lustre, shine in our proper orbit—The stars indeed can shine only when the sun is withdrawn; but the brighter the Lord Jesus shines, the more shall we reflect his image—Let us then “walk in the light as God is in the light^p,” and let “our path be as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day^q”—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who, though living in the midst of the light, have never yet seen it

[Such are without excuse—God would “make the scales to fall from our eyes,” if we would but call upon him—But our rejection of the light will be the occasion of our more aggravated condemnation—“If Christ had not come and spoken unto us we had not had sin; but now we have no cloke for our sin^r”—Let us then cry to him, like those of old, “Lord, open my eyes”—Then shall we no longer walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life^s—]

2. Those who, though they have had some views of Christ, are yet in darkness

[The sun in the heavens is sometimes obscured by intervening clouds: thus also “the sun of righteousness” is sometimes veiled; and we are left to walk many days without any cheering views of his countenance—If this be the case with us, let us tarry his leisure, and wait patiently for his return—Let us not say, “My sun is set to rise no more;” but rather, “When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me^t”—Thus in his light you shall see light^u; “the light that is sown for you shall in due time spring up^x,” yea, your light shall rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon-day^y—]

3. Those who are enjoying the light of the Redeemer’s countenance

[Jesus is the light and glory, not of the church militant only, but also of the church triumphant^z: and to “behold his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father^a” is an anticipation and foretaste of heaven itself—“In his favour is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself”—Let the enjoyment then of so rich a mercy stir you up to glorify his name; that so, while you behold his glory, you yourselves may be

^o 2 Cor. iii. 13.

^q Prov. iv. 18.

^s John viii. 12. Eph. v. 14.

^u Ps. xxxvi. 9.

^y Isai. lviii. 10.

^a John i. 14.

^p 1 John i. 7.

^r John ix. 41. and xv. 22.

^t Mich. vii. 7—9.

^x Ps. xcvi. 11.

^z Rev. xxi. 23, 24.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 18.

be changed into his image from glory to glory^b, and, by making your light to shine before men, may stir up others to glorify him also.^c—]

^c Matt. v. 16.

CLXI. THE MESSIAH'S ADVENT.

Isai. xl. 9. *Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.*

THE gospel with all its sublime mysteries is regarded by the generality with coldness and indifference; whereas the most indistinct prospects of it were sufficient to fill the patriarchs and prophets with holy rapture—It was a view of its divine author which drew forth from the prophet this animated exhortation—He saw Jesus as it were already incarnate, and called upon the daughters of Zion and Jerusalem to proclaim and celebrate his advent^a—That, which he proposed to them as the subject of their song, is the one great subject also of our ministrations—To call your attention unto Jesus, to set him forth as crucified before your eyes, and, with an exalted voice, to cry, Behold your God, this is our commission—But before we proceed to execute it, we shall

I. Shew what is implied in this commission

We cannot fail to observe, what the prophet so strongly intimates

1. That Christ is God

[This is a fundamental article of our faith—The Godhead of Christ is that which stamps a value on his sufferings, and renders the whole of his undertaking so meritorious and efficient—It would be to little purpose to say with Pilate, “Behold the man,” if we could not also add with the prophet, “Behold your God”—But we are not left to doubt of this important truth: it is clearly established in almost every page of the sacred volume: we need go no further than to the writings of Isaiah; and we shall find it expressly asserted, that the person who was to be “a Child born, and a Son given to us,” was THE MIGHTY GOD^b—He was *therefore* to be called Emmanuel, because he was God with us^c—In the very chapter before us, his

^a It should be read as in the margin, “O daughter, that bringest good tidings to Zion,” &c. It was customary for women to celebrate the praises of God in public on remarkable occasions. See Exod. xv. 20, 21. and 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7.

^b Isai. ix. 6.

^c Isai. vii. 14. with Matt. i. 23.

his forerunner, John the Baptist, was commissioned to cry, Prepare ye the way of THE LORD (Jehovah) make straight in the desert an high-way for OUR GOD^d—But we need not multiply words on this subject, since the voice of inspiration universally proclaims him to have been, “God manifest in the flesh,” “God over all, blessed for ever^e”—]

2. That the knowledge of Christ is of universal importance

[It was through all “the cities of Judah,” and with her “voice lifted up with strength,” that the daughter of Zion was to celebrate the Messiah’s advent—And whence the need of such zeal and labour, but on account of the universal importance of those glad tidings?—Indeed there is no other thing which men so much need to be acquainted with as the work and offices of Christ—No attainments can save them, if they be ignorant of Christ; nor can any past sins condemn them, if they be truly acquainted with this divine Saviour—“This, as our Lord himself tells us, is life eternal, to know God as the only true God, and Jesus Christ^f” as our mediator and advocate with the Father—So excellent is this knowledge, that St. Paul “counted all things but loss and dung in comparison of it^g”—It is the one mean of obtaining reconciliation with God, peace of conscience, and deliverance from the power of sin^h—O that all were aware how deeply they are interested in receiving these glad tidings!—We should proclaim them with infinitely greater pleasure, if we had not so much reason to complain, that “they are counted as a strange thingⁱ”—]

Taking for granted these fundamental and indisputable truths, we shall

II. Endeavour to execute the commission

The text does not limit us to any particular point of view in which we are to behold our God; we shall therefore direct your attention to him

1. As descending from heaven

[Lo! he comes from his bright abodes: but in what form does he appear? Does he descend in solemn pomp, attended with myriads of the heavenly host? Does he visit the palaces of the great, and assume our nature in its most dignified appearance? No: He is born of an obscure virgin, and has no better place for his reception than a stable—Go, look into his mean abode; see him wrapped in swadling-clothes, and lying in a manger;

^d Ver. 3.

^f John xvii. 3.

^h 1 John i. 7.

^e 1 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. ix. 5.

^g Phil. iii. 8.

ⁱ Hos. viii. 12.

manger; look, I say, and behold your God!—What marvellous condescension! how does it almost exceed belief! yet, incredible as it appears, we must again say, Behold your God—]

2. As sojourning on earth

[Surely, no sooner could his incarnation be known, than all the world, like the eastern magi, must flock to worship him^k: so one might reasonably hope; but what is that “weeping and lamentation” that we hear? The young child’s life is sought: The children from two years old and under are massacred through the whole district, that no possibility may be left for his escape: and He is saved only by the special interposition of his heavenly Father^l. See his parents fleeing with him by night to a distant, an heathen, land, nor daring to return to their native country till the death of their blood-thirsty persecutor! But this was only the beginning of sorrows—View him afterwards when he assumed his proper office as the Prophet of his church: no sooner did he open his commission, than the short-lived applause afforded him, was turned into the most cruel indignation; and, if he had not by an exertion of his own almighty power effected his escape, his very first sermon had proved his last^m—But to pass over to the period of his death—Whom is it that we see prostrate on the ground, and bathed in a bloody sweat? Who is it that those cruel soldiers are mocking, buffeting, scourging? Who is it that is nailed to yonder cross, and that we see expiring under such an accumulated weight of shame and misery?—To all this we answer, Behold your God—]

3. As exalted to glory

[Hitherto we have witnessed nothing but his humiliation—But the shame of his cross was quickly rolled away—In vain were the stone, the seal, the watch: he burst the bands of death, and rose triumphant—Henceforth we are to view him ascending amidst myriads of exulting angels, sitting on the throne of his glory, dispensing blessings to the church below, and receiving the adorations of his church above—Sinner, lift up thine eyes to heaven, and behold thy once crucified, but now exalted, Redeemer—Now he shines forth in all his glory, and says to thee, even to thee, “Behold me, behold meⁿ”—O that every eye might see him, and that all, who have pierced him by their sins, might mourn and be in bitterness, as one that mourneth for his first-born son^o!—Soon indeed all shall see him: the time is shortly coming, when he will descend from heaven again, not however to stand, as before, like a criminal
at

^k Matt. ii. 11.

^l Matt. ii. 16—20.

^m Luke iv. 28—30.

ⁿ Isai. lxxv. 1.

^o Zech. xii. 10.

at man's tribunal, but to execute judgment on the assembled universe; and then, happy shall they be who have beheld him *here* with suitable affection; they shall behold his face with inexpressible delight; and be the spectators of his glory and the partners of his throne to all eternity—]

ADDRESS

1. The careless

[Know you what the sins, which you commit so lightly, have occasioned? Go to Calvary and behold your God; and then judge whether sin be so light and venial a matter as you are ready to imagine!—The Jews and Romans were the immediate actors in that bloody tragedy; but your sins, and the sins of an ungodly world, were the real occasion of all that your God endured; and, while you continue in your sins, you “crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame”—Ah! Did David cast away the water, for which the lives of three men had been endangered, and will not you cast away the sins which have actually shed the blood of God?^p—Let this thought induce you to put away the polluted cup from your lips; and let “the love of Christ constrain you to live unto him who died for *you* and rose again”—]

2. The heavy-laden

[To you especially the Saviour cries, “Look unto me, and be ye saved,” “Come unto me and find rest unto your souls”—Consider well, who it is that thus invites you; it is your Saviour, and your *God*;—there can be no want of efficacy in his blood, or of power in his arm: he is a strong rock, a sure foundation, an all-sufficient help—Trust then in him; and, as a sight of the brazen serpent healed the dying Israelite, so shall a view of your divine Saviour prove an effectual remedy for all your wants—You shall soon, like Thomas, exclaim with holy rapture, “My Lord and my God;” or, in the language long since dictated to you by the spirit of prophecy, “*Lo, this is our God*; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the *LORD*; we have waited for him: we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation^q”—]

^p 2 Sam. xxiii. 16, 17.

^q Isai. xxv. 9.

CLXII. CHRIST'S QUALIFICATIONS FOR HIS OFFICE.

Isai. xi. 2, 3. *And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.*

THE richest promises which God has given to the church, are generally introduced after some awful threatening denounced against his enemies. The prophet has been predicting the utter ruin of the Assyrians, as of a tree cut down to the very stump. He then contrasts the state of the church, to which the Messiah should come, springing like a tender sucker from the root of Jesse, after that his family should have been reduced to the lowest state of degradation. He then, in reference perhaps to what he had before spoken respecting "the anointing^a," shews who this anointed person should be, and what was that unction with which he should be consecrated to his office.

From the words of the text, which beyond all doubt refer to Christ, the son of David, we shall be led to consider

I. His qualifications for his office

The same Spirit that formed Christ's body in the virgin's womb^b, endowed also his soul with all the faculties requisite for the discharge of his high office

[Jesus Christ, *as a man*, needed to have his mind enlightened, and his heart sanctified, even as other men: nor could he have been qualified for his *mediatorial* work, if he had not been anointed in a superabundant measure, by the Holy Ghost^c. God therefore anointed him^d, and caused the Spirit to rest upon him^{dd}, not merely for a time, and for a limited purpose, as he had done to others^e, but in an immeasurable fulness^f, and for every end for which he could possibly need it^g.

The Spirit came upon him as a "Spirit of *wisdom and understanding*."

^a Ch. x. 27.

^b Matt. i. 18, 20.

^c Ps. xlv. 7.

^d Acts x. 38.

^{dd} John i. 32.

^e Numb. xi. 25, 26.

^f John iii. 34.

^g Luke iv. 18, 19.

understanding^h." He gave to Jesus a full and comprehensive view of all the mysteries which from eternity had been hid in the bosom of the Fatherⁱ; and enabled him also to discern the most secret recesses of men's hearts^k: so that nothing, either in heaven or in earth, was concealed from him^l.

The Spirit, as "a spirit of counsel and might," instructed him how to conduct himself in all those situations of difficulty and danger into which he was continually brought; and endued him with such undaunted courage, unwearied activity, and invincible patience, that through the whole course of his ministry he never yielded to discouragement, or erred by inadvertence^m.

The Spirit further enriched his soul with "*the knowledge* (or rather, with *the love*ⁿ) *and fear of God*." Through his incessant operations, he was enabled to maintain a continual sense of the divine presence^o, and to act in all things with a view to his Father's glory^p. Under the influence of this divine principle He was carried on in one steady course, like the sun in its orbit, causing his light to shine with unclouded splendor through the whole period of his sojourning on earth^q.]

By these means Jesus attained the most consummate holiness

[The terms whereby the prophet expresses the quickness of Christ's spiritual perceptions, are taken from that power of smelling, which some animals possess, and which admirably represents the exquisite sensibility which our Lord possessed with respect to every thing that was right and fitting to be said or done. His enemies of every description, Herodians, Pharisees, and Sadducees, endeavoured to ensnare him. Sometimes they tempted him with questions, which, in whatever way they should be answered, would give them occasion against him: but he invariably replied with such consummate wisdom as defeated their purposes, and filled them with admiration^r. Sometimes they sought opportunity to entrap him by means of his actions: but still he was proof against their malice, and always turned their efforts to their own confusions. He knew on all occasions how to vary his conduct, so as ultimately to

answer

^h Vitrिंगa thinks that the *sevenfold* gifts of the Spirit are here enumerated. See Rev. i. 4. and v. 6. but we rather suppose that each *couplet* (not each *expression*) is to be taken separately, as declaring, in a comprehensive manner, the operations of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱ John viii. 28.

^k Matt. ix. 4.

^l John xxi. 17.

^m Isai. xlii. 2, 4, 6. and l. 4, 7.

ⁿ See Vitrिंगa in loc.

^o John viii. 29.

^p John vii. 18. and viii. 50.

^q John viii. 46. and xvii. 4.

^r Matt. xxii. 16—21, 23—33, 34—40.

^s John viii. 3—9. Luke vi. 6—11.

answer best the purposes of his mission. And so nice was his discernment, so unsearchable his skill, that, whether he denounced judgments or proclaimed mercy, whether he maintained silence or "witnessed a good confession," he invariably combined majesty with meekness, and fidelity with love.

Nor (to carry on the metaphor) was he less earnest in following, than he was acute in discerning, the path of duty. If he had spent the night in prayer, he still prosecuted by day his labours of love, till he was exhausted with fatigue, and his friends declared that his zeal transported him beyond the bounds of reason[†]: so fully was that prophecy accomplished in him, "The zeal of thine house hath even consumed me"[‡]]

Such being his qualifications, let us consider

II. Our interest in them

This is by no means a speculative subject, since it serves to shew us

1. Christ's sufficiency for his work

[The work which Christ had to do *for us*, was exceeding arduous. He was to obey the law without deviating from it in the smallest point, in thought, word, or deed. If therefore he had been turned aside by any obstacle, or had erred through any inadvertence, or fallen short through any weakness, or exceeded through any temptation, he would have been a violator of the law; and, instead of being a Saviour to us, would have needed a saviour for himself. But by these rich endowments which were communicated to him by the Holy Ghost, he was enabled to maintain an unspotted purity even to the last; and, having fulfilled the law in its utmost extent, he has "brought in an everlasting righteousness," which "shall be unto all and upon all them that believe."

Besides this, he has a work to do *in us*. He is exalted to be "head over all things to the church^{*}," in order that he may instruct his people in divine knowledge, and counsel them in their difficulties, and strengthen them in their trials, and maintain in them a superlative regard for God. And how should he effect all this, if he himself did not possess an inexhaustible treasure, out of which he might impart to every needy suppliant? But we need not fear, since we are assured, that in him all fulness dwells[‡], and that out of his fulness we may all receive, even grace for grace[‡]. We may therefore safely glory in him as made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and complete redemption[‡].]

2. The blessings we expect at his hands

[That

[†] Mark iii. 21.

[‡] Col. i. 19.

^{*} John ii. 17.

[‡] John i. 16.

^{*} Eph. i. 22, 23.

[‡] 1 Cor. i. 30.

[That holy oil which was poured upon the head of our great High-priest, was to descend to the skirts of his clothing, and to the very meanest of his members ^b. Nor are his people called Christians merely as being followers of him, but also as being partakers of the same divine unction ^c. As soon as he was seated on his throne of glory he poured out his Spirit upon his waiting disciples for the very ends and purposes for which he himself had received it ^d. Instantly they were filled with a "wisdom and understanding," which exceeded that of the greatest philosophers. They were endued with such "counsel and might," that none could withstand their words, or shake their resolution. And to such a degree were their hearts filled with the "love and fear of God," that all sublunary things were divested both of charms and terrors, and the service of God became, as it were, the very element in which they breathed.

Thus may the most ignorant amongst us have "the eyes of his understanding enlightened" by him: to every one of us will he approve himself a "wonderful counsellor ^e:" he will "strengthen us with might in our inward man:" he will fill us with a most affectionate and reverential regard for God: he will give us both an exquisite discernment of what is right, and a supreme delight in it ^f: and, in a word, he will "transform us into his own image in righteousness and true holiness ^g." However different these gifts may appear, and however unequal the capacities of those who are to receive them ^h, they shall be imparted to all according to their measure of faith ⁱ; and the Spirit that Jesus will bestow, shall work them all, and in all ^k.]

APPLICATION

[It has been seen that Christ "ascended up on high on purpose that he might fill all things ^l:" moreover he has assured us that, if we ask for the gift of his Spirit, we shall not ask in vain ^m. Let all then direct their eyes unto him. Let the ignorant, the doubting, the weak, and all who desire to have the divine life begun or perfected in their souls, apply to him. Nor let any rest satisfied with low attainments, since he is both able and willing to enlarge our faculties, to increase our sanctity, and to bring us to the measure of his own perfect stature ⁿ.]

^b Ps. cxxxiii. 2. ^c 1 John ii. 20, 27. ^d Acts ii. 33. Gal. v. 22.

^e Isai. ix. 6. ^f Col. i. 9—11. ^g Eph. iv. 24.

^h Matt. xi. 25. Isai. xxxv. 8.

ⁱ 1 Cor. xii. 4, 11. ^j Eph. iv. 10.

^k Eph. iv. 13.

^l Eph. iv. 7. Matt. ix. 29.

^m Luke xi. 13.

CLXIII. CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND CHARACTER.

Isai. ix. 6. *To us a child is born, to us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace.*

THERE is no true peace or happiness in the world except that which arises from the gospel of Christ; for God himself testifies that there is no peace to the wicked—But where the gospel truly prevails, peace and joy immediately spring up as its proper fruits—Such a change as this the prophet describes in the preceding context; and then, in the words before us, traces it to its real source—From the words themselves we shall be led to consider

I. The advent of Christ to take the charge of his kingdom

Though given to us by God, he came in an obscure and humble form

[He was a little “child, born” in as helpless a state as others, and subject to all the sinless infirmities of our nature. He was indeed in a more especial manner *the gift* of the Father's love^a; the most invaluable gift that God himself could bestow. He was *the Child*, and *the Son*, of whom all the prophets spake, the offspring of a virgin, “Emmanuel, God with us.” But as the end of his coming was to redeem our fallen race, he came in such a way, as was best suited to the accomplishment of his own eternal purpose and grace—]

Yet, notwithstanding his mean appearance, he came to assume the government of the church

[As the Creator of the universe, He must of necessity have also been the governor of it before his incarnation—But now he came to administer the government *as mediator*; for all judgment was committed to him, not only *as the Son of man*, but *because he was the Son of man*^b—The church, in a more especial manner, is subjected to him in this view; and he is the head of it, as well for the purpose of communicating his influence to the members, as of managing its concerns^c—And so entirely is every thing under his control, that not so much as a hair falls from the head of any of his people without either his express command, or righteous permission—As in the days of

^a John iii. 16.

^b John v. 27.

^c Eph. i. 22.

of his flesh he exercised the most unlimited authority over diseases, devils, and the very elements, so now every thing, whether designedly, or against its will, fulfils his unerring counsels—]

We shall the less wonder at his elevation to a throne, if we consider

II. His qualifications for the regal office

His being called by any name, imports that He really is what he is called—He is therefore

1. A wonderful Counsellor^d

[He, in concert with the Father, formed the stupendous plan of man's redemption, a plan in which are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge^e—Moreover in executing this plan, he has not only defeated all the plots and devices of Satan, but has invariably overruled them for the accomplishment of his own designs—His people too he endues with “wisdom from above,” enabling them to discern things hidden from the carnal eye, and guiding them in the way to heaven, so that a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein^f—Who that has known ever so small a part of his ways, must not exclaim with amazement, How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!—]

2. The mighty God

[Angels and magistrates are sometimes called gods in a subordinate sense; but He is “The mighty God,” “God with us,” “even God, over all blessed for ever”—The dispensations, both of his providence and grace, manifest him to be a “God, wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working”—Indeed, if he were not God, he never could bear upon his shoulder the government of the universe—He must be omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, or else he never could hear the supplications, and supply the wants, of all his people at the same instant—However strange therefore it may seem, He who was a little child, was at the same time the mighty God; it was “the Lord of glory that was crucified;” it was “God who purchased the church with his own blood^g.”]

3. The everlasting Father

[This title respects not his relation to the Deity (for with respect to *that*, he is the Son and not the Father) but rather his relation to his spiritual seed, whom he has begotten by his word

^d These are by many considered as two distinct titles; but, if we unite them, each title will have its proper attribute.

^e Col. ii. 3. ἐν ᾧ, scil. *μυστηρίω*.

^f Isai. xxxv. 8.

^g 1 Cor. ii. 8. Acts xx. 28.

word and Spirit—But perhaps the words should rather have been translated, “The Father of the everlasting age”—The Jewish dispensation was intended to continue but for a limited time; but the Christian dispensation was never to be succeeded by any other: hence it is called “the last times;” and may be considered as “the everlasting age”—Of this Christ is the author; it owes its existence to him as its parent; it is preserved by his guardian care; and the whole family in heaven and earth who participate its blessings, both bear his image, and inherit his glory—]

4. The Prince of peace

[In all which Christ has done, whether in planning or executing the work of redemption, he has consulted the peace and welfare of his people—It was to purchase their peace that he became incarnate and died upon the cross—It was to bestow on them the blessings of peace, that he assumed the reins of government, and undertook to manage all their concerns—Peace was the legacy which he left to his church when he was just departing from the world; and, on his ascension, he poured it down like a river on myriads of his blood-thirsty enemies: yea, at this very hour does he dispense it according to his own sovereign will, and impart it, with royal munificence, to all the subjects of his kingdom—]

This subject furnishes us with abundant reason

1. For admiration

[If all heaven was filled with wonder at the sight of their incarnate God, and if the “Angels yet desire to look into” that “great mystery of godliness,” how marvellous should it appear in our eyes!—Let us then adore with reverence what we cannot comprehend; and exclaim with profound wonder, “Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift^h”—]

2. For gratitude

[Has the mighty God become a little child for us, and shall we regard his condescension with indifference?—Is he governing and overruling every thing for our good, and shall we feel no sense of his kindness?—Let us rather say, What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me?—]

3. For devotedness to God

[If the government be upon his shoulder, we should shew ourselves willing to have it there, and submit ourselves cheerfully to his authority—In vain shall we regard him as the source and foundation of our peace, unless we yield ourselves to him as the governor of our lives—]

CLXIV. CHRIST SAVING BY HIS UNITED OFFICES.

Zech. vi. 12, 13. Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold, the man whose name is The BRANCH: and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

MANY of the most important prophecies were introduced with remarkable and appropriate signs—When God foretold to Moses the deliverance of his people from their bondage in Egypt, he appeared to him in a burning bush, which represented the state of his church as persecuted on every side, but preserved from injury by his presence in it—Thus was Joshua the high-priest now made to receive an honour which described in a very significant manner the glory and dignity of the promised Messiah—Some of the Jews who had chosen to remain in Babylon after that their brethren had returned to their own land, shewed that they were not altogether unmindful of their brethren or their God, by bringing a present of gold and silver for the use of the newly erected temple: and God instantly commanded that two crowns should be made of the gold and silver, and that these crowns should, in the presence of the donors, be put upon the head of Joshua: then, in explanation of this sign, the prophet was ordered to direct their attention to the promised Messiah, in whom all honour and power, whether regal or priestly, should be combined^a—

This prophecy will lead us to consider

I. The name and work of the Messiah

Christ is here referred to as “the man whose name is The BRANCH”

[Frequently is he characterized by the prophets under this appellation^b—Its import is, that he was to be a scion or shoot springing out of the stem of Jesse, that is, to be born of the house of David, when it was cut down and reduced to the lowest state^c—But though he was to appear in such a weak and mean condition, yet he was to “sit upon the throne of his father

^a Ver. 9—11.

^b Ch. iii. 8. Isai. iv. 2.

^c Isai. xi. 1. and liii. 2.

father David and to reign for ever”—Nor can we err in applying this prophecy to Christ, since another prophet, speaking of him by the very same name, expatiates in exalted terms upon the glory of his majesty, and declares that the name whereby he should be still more eminently distinguished, should be, *JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*^d—In due time he “grew up out of his place,” both out of Bethlehem, where he was born, and out of Nazareth, where he was brought up—We do not indeed find him called “*The Branch*” by any of the New Testament writers; but, *as the place where this branch was to grow up is so particularly specified*, it is not impossible but that this prophecy received its accomplishment in that contemptuous appellation given to him, “*The Nazarene*”^e: at all events it was fulfilled in that title so often ascribed to him, “*The Son of David*”^f—]

The work to which he was appointed was, to build the temple

[The material temple was now rebuilding under the auspices of Zerubbabel and Joshua—In reference to that, the prophet speaks of another temple (of which that which was now erecting was but a type or shadow) which should in due time be raised by the Messiah himself; and he repeats his declaration both to denote the great importance of it, and the certainty of its accomplishment—This temple is no other than the church of God, which Jesus Christ has founded on the earth, and against which neither the power nor the policy of hell shall ever prevail^g.—]

To him also, as the only builder, was to be given all “the glory”

[Whatever instruments he uses, they can effect nothing but through the agency of his Spirit—Whether Paul plant or Apollos water, it is Christ alone that can give the increase^h—The workmen in the material temple might say of the carved work, This and that was the work of my hands; it was formed by my skill, and is a monument of my power: but, in the church of God, there is not one stone laid in the whole building, which was not dug from the quarry, fitted for its place, and fixed in its station by the hand of Jesus: and the chisel has as much right to boast against him who worketh with it, as any instrument, which the Lord may use, has to arrogate to himself any part of his honour—When the top-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, there shall not be one in heaven or

^d Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.
signifies a *Branch*.

^e Matt. ii. 23. The Hebrew word *Netzer*

^f Matt. xx. 30, 31. and xxi. 9.

^g Matt. xvi. 18. Eph. ii. 20, 21.

^h 1 Cor. iii. 7.

ⁱ Isai. x. 15.

or earth, who will not ascribe the glory to the divine architect, crying, Grace, grace unto it^k—]

As his work was to be glorious, so were also

II. The offices whereby he was to execute that work

Mean as his appearance was, he was appointed to bear the highest offices

1. He was to rule both as a king and as a priest

[As “King of kings and Lord of lords,” he erects his throne over all in heaven and earth—But he exercises also a government which the Father has committed to him in his mediatorial capacity—This relates more immediately to the church, the minutest concerns of which are all subject to his control^l—But though a king, he executes also the office of a priest; and appeared to the apostle arrayed in priestly vestments, in token that he still carries on the work which he began on earth^m—In him the kingly power of Zerubbabel, and the priestly office of Joshua, were to be united: and it was for this reason that both the crowns were put upon the head of Joshua, who in so remarkable a manner represented him—Being “a priest upon his throne,” his government was to be mild, like that of a compassionate priest; and his intercession effectual, like that of an almighty King—]

2. By these united offices he was to perform the work assigned him

[The salvation of men has been contrived by infinite wisdom, and is effected only in that way which God has appointed—It is not accomplished either by power alone or by price alone; but by price and by power—Christ in his priestly office atones; and in his kingly office imparts the benefit of that atonement: “the counsel of peace is between them both”—However meritorious the death of Christ might be as a sacrifice, we could receive no salvation by it, unless he exert his almighty power to renew and sanctify our nature; nor, on the other hand, would his grace be sufficient to bring us unto God, unless he had offered a sacrifice for our sins, and continued in heaven to make intercession for us—But by making satisfaction to the injured Majesty of heaven, and delivering us out of the hands of all our spiritual enemies, he both effects our reconciliation with God, and renders us meet for our heavenly inheritance—]

INFER

1. What abundant provision has God made for our peace!

[A guilty

^k Zech. iv. 7.

^l Eph. i. 22.

^m Rev. i. 13.

[A guilty conscience is not easily pacified : in the midst of all its endeavours to divert its attention from the state of the soul, it will feel many fears and secret misgivings: it will always suspect, either that something which they do not possess, is necessary for the securing of pardon, or that the exertions used for the attainment of holiness, are inadequate to the end proposed—But God has given us a Saviour, who equally bears the sacerdotal censer, and the regal diadem; and unites in himself the compassion of a priest, with the power of a king—What then can be wanting to satisfy our minds? Surely we need only believe; and “according to our faith so shall it be done unto us”—If our minds be but “stayed on Christ” as a willing and all-sufficient Saviour, we shall, according to his word, be “kept in perfect peace”—]

2. How evidently must all the glory of our salvation be given to Christ!

[We always wish to ascribe some of the glory to ourselves: but the whole work is his from the foundation to the top-stone: He is “the author and the finisher of our faith”—Are we reconciled to God? it is through the blood of his cross: is our peace maintained with God? it is through his prevailing intercession: are we freed from the bondage of sin and Satan? it is through his mighty power, and victorious grace—Let him then “bear the glory:” on him “let us hang all the glory of his Father’s house^a:” and let us now sing, as we hope to do to all eternity, To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen^o—]

^a Isai. xxii. 24.

^o Rev. i. 5, 6.

CLXV. THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISING.

Mal. iv. 1, 2. *Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

THE thought of many is, that “God will do neither good nor evil,” and that it is therefore unnecessary and
10
vain

vain to make him an object either of our hope or fear. This was the state of mind in which the greater part of the Jews were in the time of Malachi: and God sent his prophet to warn them, that a time was coming when they should clearly discern between the righteous and the wicked by the awful judgments he would inflict on the one, and the unspeakable benefits he would confer on the other^a.

In the words before us are contained

I. A warning to the wicked

The following context leads us immediately to the times of the Messiah; and to them we must look for the accomplishment of this tremendous threatening

[Temporal judgments are often predicted in similar language. The enemies of the Jews^b, and the Jews themselves^c, yea, and all the enemies of God^d, are menaced in this manner. But never were they fulfilled so fearfully as in the destruction of Jerusalem, Thither almost the whole Jewish nation were assembled; and, being shut up in the city, as in an oven, they were made astonishing monuments of God's fiery indignation.]

But doubtless this warning refers also to the day of judgment

[In that day the judge himself will come in flames of fire^e: and the earth, the theatre on which so much wickedness has been acted, shall be burnt up^f: and the objects of God's displeasure shall be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone^g.

It is asked, Who they are that shall then suffer the vengeance of eternal fire? We answer, The proud contemners of God's law, and they who "go about to establish their own righteousness" instead of submitting to the righteousness of God; and they who think religion vain and unprofitable^h; yea, moreover, all who commit any kind of wickedness knowingly, deliberately, and habitually, all, I say, without exception, shall be as stubble to the consuming fireⁱ.

And shall we not take warning, when we know that the day is coming, and that every hour brings it nearer and nearer? O "let it not overtake us as a thief." Our forbearing to reflect upon it cannot delay its approach, or mitigate its terrors.

Be

^a Zeph. i. 12.

^b Isai. x. 16—18.

^c Zeph. i. 14—18.

^d Ps. xxi. 8, 9.

^e 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

^f 2 Pet. iii. 10—12.

^g Rev. xxi. 8.

^h Mal. iii. 13, 14.

ⁱ Rom. i. 18.

Be persuaded to prepare for it, that, instead of dreading, you may welcome its arrival.]

We turn with pleasure from this awful subject to contemplate the latter part of the text, wherein we have

II. A promise to the righteous

Whatever distant reference there may be in these words to the deliverance of the Christians from Jerusalem, when, according to our Lord's instructions, they took advantage of the retreat of the Roman army, to flee out of it to Pella, we must certainly look for the accomplishment of the promise principally in the *spiritual* blessings conveyed by the Messiah.

The Christian character is briefly delineated in contrast with God's enemies

[The fear of God is often represented as comprising the whole of religion : and indeed, wherever that obtains, pride will be humbled, wickedness banished, and every holy affection cultivated to the utmost. Let those who have reason to think themselves under its genuine influence, listen with gratitude to the promise, which God himself addresses to them.]

To those who answer to this character, shall Christ be a source of the richest blessings

[Christ is "the sun" of the spiritual world, and the one fountain of light and life to all that believe in him. He is also the Sun of righteousness, not only as being pure and spotless in himself, but as being the author of all righteousness, whether of that which is imputed to us for justification, or that which is imparted to us by sanctification. And how delightful was the sight of him to those who beheld him rising on this benighted world, to those, into whose hearts he shined with his refreshing beams ! On them he shone, not with burning rays, that dry up and wither the earth and all its fruits, but with genial warmth, "healing" the desolations of winter, and causing every herb to spring forth into life and vigour. How did the first Christians "go forth" out of a dead and carnal state, and "grow up" with astonishing rapidity and strength "as the calves of the stall !" Thus also, in this day, does the light of his countenance convey healing to our souls. A sight of him removes both the guilt we have contracted, and the pollutions, whereby we have been defiled ; thus "healing" at once the deadly wounds of sin, and restoring health and beauty to those who have been debased by more than leprous deformity. Who would not wish to bask in his beams, and to experience the full effects of his renovating power ?]

IMPROVE-

IMPROVEMENT

1. How different *even in this life* are the states of God's friends, and of his enemies !

[The "proud are called happy^k:" but *are* they so? the heart-searching God declares that they have no solid peace. Nor is it possible that they can look forward to the day of judgment without much disquietude of mind. Their joys, such as they are, are "like the crackling of thorns under a pot," of short duration, and succeeded by smoke and darkness, by spleen and melancholy. But, is this the state of God's people? Let the text declare, and let the experience of all the saints attest. The more they enjoy of the light of this Sun of righteousness, the more they anticipate the blessedness of heaven.]

2. How different will be the states of God's friends and enemies *in the eternal world* !

[The day of judgment is called "The day of wrath," and, "The day of the perdition of ungodly men^l." Alas! alas! whither shall the objects of God's vengeance flee? How shall they "dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who can conceive the anguish with which they will "weep and wail and gnash their teeth?" View, on the contrary, the godly healed of every malady, grown to the full measure of the stature of Christ, and enjoying continually the meridian glories of the sun of righteousness—Who can conceive the happiness of such a state? But though "we know not yet what we shall be," so far as respects the *degrees* of our happiness or misery, we know that the distance between the righteous and the wicked will be immeasurably great. Would to God that, in the contemplation of it, we might fear the Lord, and walk in his fear to the latest period of our lives !]

^k Ch. iii. 15.

^l Rom. ii. 5. 2 Pet. iii. 7.

CLXVI. CHRIST THE LIGHT AND SALVATION OF THE GENTILES.

Isai. xlix. 6. *And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*

THAT the Gentiles were to be received into the church of God, was a truth which the Jews were backward to admit—

Several

Several years after the gospel had been preached to the Jews, Peter declined visiting the Gentiles, and was afterwards called to an account by the apostles themselves for going to them^a—

Nor could any thing but repeated miracles in their favour overcome the prejudices which he entertained respecting them—

Not but that the conversion of the Gentiles had been very frequently and plainly foretold—

The very passage before us, if there had been no other, was quite sufficient to raise an expectation of that event—

In the context there is a conversation between Jehovah and his Son—

The Messiah announces to the Gentiles his qualifications for the work to which he was called^b—

But at the same time complains that his labours among the Jews were almost in vain^c—

Nevertheless He declares his unshaken confidence that Jehovah would not leave him without ultimate success^d—

Jehovah then, in answer to his Son, assures him, that however he may be treated by the Jews, he shall be upheld and accepted in his work^e—

And that his failure among the Jewish nation shall be far overbalanced by his success among the Gentiles—

To elucidate this prophecy, we shall consider

I. The characters here given to Christ

There can be no doubt but that the words of the text relate to Christ

[They are far too strong to be applied to Isaiah himself—

Nor could they with propriety be spoken of any but the Messiah—

The expressions here used are similar to those which the prophet elsewhere uses in reference to him^f—

They were evidently alluded to by the patriarch when he took up the infant Jesus in his arms^g—

And are expressly quoted by St. Paul as having received their accomplishment in Christ^h—]

To

^a Acts xi. 1, 2. This was six or seven years after Christ's ascension.

^b Ver. 1—3.

^c Ver. 4.

^d Ib.

^e Ver. 5.

^f Isai. xlii. 1, 6 and lx. 3. ^g Luke ii. 30—32. ^h Acts. xiii. 46, 47.

To him the characters, there specified, most eminently belong—

He is “the Restorer of Israel,” having reconciled “many myriads” of them to God—

He is also the “Light of the Gentiles”—

[Another prophet describes him as “the Sun of righteousness”ⁱ—

In the New Testament also he is repeatedly called “the Light of the world”^k—

Others have enlightened the world by revealing the will of God—

But He alone reveals it by his Spirit to the souls of men—

He only, who opened Lydia’s heart, can have access to ours^l—

He only, who opened the understanding of his disciples, can illumine our benighted minds^m—

And this he does for them that lie in darkness and the shadow of death—

While his once favoured people the Jews are blinded, he takes the veil from our hearts, and guides us into all truth—

Thus does he abundantly fulfil to us his gracious promiseⁿ—]

He is moreover “the salvation of men even to the ends of the world”

[Many of the judges and kings of Israel were Saviours in a temporal view—

But Jesus imparts to his followers a far more glorious salvation—

By his own blood he has “obtained an eternal redemption” for them—

And by his meritorious obedience he renders them completely righteous—

He is not merely a Saviour to them, but “salvation” itself—

As he procured, so he imparts, maintains, and perfects the salvation of those who trust in him—

There are none so remote but he extends to them the benefits of his death—

“He came to save the lost,” in whatever quarter of the globe they be—

For this very end was he sent into the world by his heavenly Father—

And, as being expressly appointed to this office, he is called *God’s* salvation—]

In fulfilling these characters; he displays

II. The

ⁱ Mal. iv. 2.

ⁿ Luke xxiv. 45.

^k John i. 4, 9.

^l Acts xvi. 14.

^m John viii. 12.

II. The excellence of the dispensation committed to him

The dispensation of the law to the Jews was glorious

[There was much of the gospel communicated in and with the law—

The ceremonial rights were altogether “shadows of the good things” which were afterwards to be more fully revealed—

The moral law itself, while it condemned the Jews, was intended to promote their salvation—

And many, in different ages, were guided to heaven by the light which was then afforded them—

The Mosaic law therefore was a rich blessing to that nation—

And the salvation of a remnant from among them clearly manifested the efficacy of the great sacrifice—]

But the dispensation of the gospel to the whole world is incomparably more glorious

It brings far greater good to men

[We must not disparage the salvation of one single soul—

Much less should we undervalue the mercy shewn to so many of the Jews—

But still, the Jews were a small body when compared with the Gentile world—

And it was but a little remnant, even of them, that obtained mercy—

But the publication of the gospel to the Gentiles has been the means of saving unnumbered myriads—

There are persons in every quarter of the globe, who experience the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood—

Yea, every day and hour are multitudes ascending from the darkest corners of the earth to swell the chorus in heaven—

How much more glorious then is the dispensation which diffuses its blessings so extensively, than that which confined them to such a narrow sphere!—

Surely it would have been “a light thing to save the Jews” in comparison of such a multitude—

We may well therefore apply to this subject those words of the Apostle°—]

It brings also far greater glory to the Saviour himself

[Had none but Jews been saved by him, he might have appeared partial in his regards—

Or it might be thought that his sacrifice was but of a limited value—

But the extension of mercy to the Gentiles displays “the exceeding riches of his grace”—

And shews that his death is a sufficient “propitiation for the sins of the whole world”—

How

How transcendent is the Redeemer's glory in this view!—

And how glorious will he appear, when all that he has redeemed from every nation of the earth shall unite in ascribing salvation to him!—

The saving of a few from one nation only would not have been a suitable recompence for his work—

He might well have complained that he had “spent his strength for nought”—

But he will be fully “satisfied with the travail of his soul,” because “the birth of his womb will be as the dew of the morning?”—]

We shall conclude with a word or two of ADVICE

1. Welcome the Saviour under the characters which are here given him

[We all need him as the light of our minds, and the Saviour of our souls—

Let none then boast of the light of reason, or “lean to their own understanding”—

Nor let us trust in our own goodness to merit, or strength to work out salvation—

Let us rather look to Jesus for the teaching of his word and Spirit—

And unite our acknowledgements with those of the saints of old^a—

Let us rejoice exceedingly that “help is laid upon One so mighty”^r—

And let us receive him for all the ends for which he is offered to us^s—

Let none say, I am so far off, I can never hope for salvation by him—

His exhortation recorded by the prophet yet sounds in our ears^t—

Nor shall any be ashamed who put their trust in him—]

2. Do not attempt to separate his characters, but unite them

[In vain shall we hope to be saved by Christ, if he have not enlightened our understandings—

Though he gives not to all his people the same degree of knowledge, he invariably instructs them in the most important truths—

And if we have no views of the evil of sin, the deceitfulness of the heart, the beauty of holiness, and the suitableness of his salvation, we are still in a lost and perishing condition—

The text itself informs us that Christ becomes our salvation by being our light—

On

^p Ps. cx. 3.

^a Isai. xlv. 24.

^r Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^s 1 Cor. i. 30.

^t Isai. xlv. 22.

On the other hand, let us not rest in a speculative knowledge of these things—

We must manifest the practical and sanctifying effects of what we know—

We must be delivered from the love and practice both of open and secret sin—

Without this, the clearest perception of divine truths will be of no avail—

Let us unite in our experience what is thus united in Christ—

And seek to grow as well in gracious affections, as in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour^u—]

^u 2 Pet. iii. 18.

CLXVII. THE EQUITY OF CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT.

2 Sam. xxiii. 1—4. *Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the annointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God: and he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds: as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.*

THESE words are generally understood as descriptive of the duty of civil governors, and of the happiness of any people who live under a government that is thus administered. But they have doubtless a further reference, even to Christ himself, whose character they designate in the most appropriate terms. The very energetic manner in which the prophecy before us is introduced, and the strong profession which the writer makes of his immediate inspiration from God, leave no doubt upon the mind, but that something more must be intended in this passage than a mere direction to earthly magistrates. A very small alteration in the translation will exhibit it in its true light^a.
Christ

^a The passage might more properly be translated thus: David the son of Jesse *saith*, and the man, &c. *saith*, The Spirit of the Lord *speaketh* by me, and his word *is* in my tongue; the God of Israel *saith*, the Rock of Israel *speaketh* to me, The JUST ONE ruleth over men; he ruleth in the fear of God: as the light of the morning A SUN shall rise, even a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springeth out of the earth, &c.

Christ is frequently spoken of in scripture as the JUST ONE^b, in contradistinction to all others; and as the SUN that enlightens the whole spiritual world^c. The prophet Malachi, probably having an eye to the very passage before us, combines the two ideas, and foretels the advent of Christ, as "the Sun of righteousness^d." In this view of the words, we shall be led to consider

I. The nature of Christ's government

[In the sacred oracles, a peculiar stress is laid on the *equity* of that dominion which Christ exercises over his chosen people^e. And who that has submitted to his government, must not confirm the truth that is so much insisted on? Behold *his laws*; is there one which does not tend to the happiness of his creatures? They are all comprehended in one word, Love; love to God, and love to man: and can any thing be conceived more excellent in itself, or more beneficial to man, than such a law? Well does the apostle say of it, that it is "holy and just and good^f." Behold *his administration*; is there any one point in which a righteous governor can excel, that is not found, in its most perfect measure, in him? He relieves the needy, succours the weak, protects the oppressed, and executes judgment without any respect of persons: and though none merit any thing at his hands, he dispenses rewards and punishments in as exact proportion to the conduct of men, as if he weighed their merits in a balance. Who ever sought him diligently, without finding him? Who ever did much or suffered much for him, without ample testimonies of his approbation? On the other hand, who ever drew back from him, or violated his holy laws, without "receiving in himself that recompence which was meet?" Whatever inequalities may appear in his government (as when virtue is oppressed, and vice is triumphant) he removes them all, by vouchsafing to the sufferer the consolations of his Spirit, and the prospects of his glory. Thus truly may he be said to "rule in the fear of God!"]

If prosperity and happiness result from a righteous administration of civil governments, much more are they the portion of Christ's subjects. This is beautifully illustrated in the words before us; wherein his government is further delineated in

II. Its effects

[The sun rising in the unclouded hemisphere, cheers and exhilarates

^b Acts iii. 14. & vii. 52. & xxii. 14. ^c John viii. 12. ^d Mal. iv. 2. ^e Isai, ix. 7. & xi. 2—5. "in the fear of the Lord." ^f Rom. vii. 12.

exhilarates all who behold it : and, when it shines on the earth that has been refreshed with gentle showers, it causes the grass, and every herb, to spring forth almost visibly before our eyes. And is it not thus with all who submit themselves to Christ? do not new prospects open to them, and, with their more enlarged views, are they not revived with proportionable consolations? are they not gladdened with the light of his countenance? are they not sometimes almost overwhelmed with the glory of his countenance, or transported with joy unspeakable? yes; to them there is an unclouded sky, except as far as sin prevails : if they were as perfectly obedient to the will of Christ as the saints in heaven are, they would have a very heaven upon earth. If they have any intermission of their joy, it is not owing to any strictness in his laws, or any defect in his administration, but to their own indwelling lusts and corruptions.

What an astonishing effect too does the light of his countenance produce with respect to fruitfulness in good works ! let the soul, watered with the tears of penitence, and softened with contrition, once feel the genial influence of his rays, and there will be an instantaneous change in its whole deportment : “it will revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; and the scent thereof will be as the wine of Lebanon².” Every holy affection will be called forth into exercise ; and every fruit of righteousness abound to the glory of God.

Such are the effects which the psalmist elsewhere ascribes to Christ's government³ ; and such, in all ages, have invariably resulted from it¹.]

INFER

1. How earnestly should we desire the universal establishment of Christ's kingdom !

[Little do men consider the import of that petition, “Thy kingdom come.” In uttering this prayer, we desire that our whole souls, and the souls of all mankind, may be subjected to Christ. And truly this event would restore the golden age of paradise. Ungodly men indeed would persuade us, that an unlimited submission to Christ would be an occasion of melancholy, and a source of misery. But if once they were to experience the effects of his government upon their own souls, they would learn, that obedience to him is the truest happiness of man. Let us then take upon us his light and easy yoke, as the only, and the certain means of finding rest unto our souls.]

2. What madness is it to continue in rebellion against Christ !

[It

² Hos. xiv. 7.

³ Ps. lxxii. 2—7.

¹ Acts ii. 41—47.

[It is not at our option whether Christ shall be our ruler or not; for "God has set him upon his holy hill of Zion," and in due season, will "put all his enemies under his feet." If we will not bow before the sceptre of his grace, he will "break us in pieces with a rod of iron." Shall we then provoke him to wrath, when we have so much to dread from his displeasure? let us rather "kiss the son, lest he be angry, and we perish from the way^k." Thus shall we now enjoy the felicity of his chosen; and, in the day that all his enemies shall be slain before him, we shall be made partners of his throne for evermore.]

^k Ps. ii. 1—12.

CLXVIII. THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST.

1 Pet. ii. 6. *It is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth in him shall not be confounded.*

THE scriptures universally speak the same language with respect to Christ: in every part he is represented as the only Saviour, and the all-sufficient help of sinful man—In this respect the Old Testament prepares us for what is contained in the New, and the New reflects light upon the Old; and thus they mutually illustrate and confirm each other—This observation naturally arises from the frequent appeals made by the apostles to the prophetic writings; and particularly from the manner in which St. Peter introduces the passage before us: he seems to intimate not only that the prophet had been inspired to declare the same truth, but that this prophecy had been given of God *on purpose* to prepare the way for the more direct injunctions of the gospel—His words declare to us

I. The excellency of Christ

Christ is often spoken of as a foundation, because he supports the spiritual temple of God; but here he is represented as a corner-stone laid by the hands of God himself

[The excellency of the chief corner-stone, which lies also at the foundation, consists in this, that while it supports the building, it also connects the different parts of it together—Now Christ has united together, not only Jews and Gentiles,

but men and angels, in one spiritual building : and while they all derive their strength from him, they all feel, through him, an union with each other^a—For this purpose “ God laid ” him in Sion from the beginning ; he laid him, I say, in types and prophecies, and declarations, and promises ; and he requires all both in heaven and earth to honour him as the one source of their strength, and the one bond of their union—]

In this view he is “ elect and precious ” in the eyes of God

[God has appointed him to execute this office from all eternity, and determined that there shall be “ no other name whereby any shall be saved ”—And, as qualified for it, as discharging it in every respect, and as saving man in perfect consistency with the honour of the divine perfections, God esteems him “ precious ; ” He declares that “ in this his beloved Son He is well-pleased ; ” and He acquiesces fully in the salvation of all who shall approve of this appointment—]

Nor will he be less precious in our eyes, if we consider
II. The security of those who “ believe in him ”

To believe in him, is, to feel an entire dependence on him ourselves, and to have such an union with him as produces a correspondent union with all the other parts of his spiritual temple—They who thus believe in him shall never be confounded

Here

[Much there is in their experience, which might well confound them, and which nothing but their union with him could enable them to support—How should they endure a sense of guilt, or bear up against their indwelling corruptions ? How should they sustain the fiery trial of persecution, or stand composed in the near prospects of death ?—These are things which disconcert and confound others ; and drive them like a ship from its anchor—But *they* have “ an anchor both sure and stedfast ”—They are not agitated, and driven to *hasty* conclusions, or *ill advised* methods of deliverance^b—“ Their heart standeth firm, trusting in the Lord ”—“ Being justified by faith they have peace with God ”—The promise that “ Sin shall not have dominion over them ” encourages their hope—Their present consolations, and future prospects of reward, soften all their trials, and enable them to “ glory in tribulations ”—And, knowing in whom they have believed, the sting of death is taken away, and they are “ delivered from their bondage to the fear of death ”—]

Here

^a Eph. ii. 14, 20, 21, 22.

^b Compare the text with the passage from whence it is taken, Isai. xxviii. 16.

Hereafter

[Terrible indeed must be the apprehensions of an unbeliever, when first dismissed from the body and carried into the presence of an holy God—And at the day of judgment, how will he stand appalled!—But the believer will go as a child into the presence of his Father, with love, and joy, and confidence—He will not be confounded at the glory of the divine Majesty, because he is washed in the Redeemer's blood, and clothed in his righteousness—Even Mary Magdalen, or the dying thief, know no terror in the presence of their God, because they are “complete in Christ:” it is on this account that they shall have confidence before him at his coming, and great boldness in the day of judgment^c—Nor is this the privilege of a few only, who are strong in faith, but of “all that believe,” whether their faith be strong or weak—]

INFER

1. How great is the difference between believers and unbelievers!

[The world perhaps may not in some instances discern much difference; but God, who sees the heart, gives this glorious promise to the one, while there is no such promise in all the sacred oracles to the other—Let us then believe on Christ; and make him “all our salvation and all our desire”—]

2. How unreasonable is the unbelief of sinful men!

[God has laid his Son for a chief corner-stone in Sion, and declared him to be precious to himself in that view: why then should he not be “elect and precious” unto *us* also?—Have we found a better foundation, or a surer bond of union?—Or can we produce one instance wherein any person that believed in him was finally confounded?—O let us consider what confusion will *probably* seize us *here*, and *certainly hereafter*, if we continue to reject him—And let us without delay “flee for refuge to the hope set before us”—]

^c 1 John ii. 28. and iv. 17.

CLXIX. THE FELICITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Isai. xxviii. 5. *In that day shall the Lord of Hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the residue of his people.*

THE sublime expressions of scripture frequently raise in our minds a pleasing sensation, while yet we entertain but very confused notions of the truths contained in them
—It

—It is scarcely possible to read the words of the text without being struck with wonder and admiration : but we cannot enter into their full import without a careful attention to the preceding context—Samaria was the capital of the ten tribes : it was situated on a high hill, and surrounded by fertile vallies, which were skirted with other hills : hence it was compared to a crown or chaplet ; which, while it adorned the adjacent country, marked its pre-eminence above all the other cities of Israel—But for the pride and intemperance of its inhabitants God denounced his judgments against it, declaring that this beautiful chaplet should be “a fading flower,” and this boasted fortress, a desolation—He foretold that its wealth and beauty should but excite the avidity of its enemies, who, as soon as they came against it, should prevail over it, and greedily devour it, as one would devour a delicious piece of fruit which he unexpectedly found hanging on a tree—Then, *to mark, as strongly as possible, the contrast between them and his faithful people*, he promises that He himself will be to his people a crown of glory that shall never perish, and a diadem of beauty that shall never fade—

This was fulfilled in the preservation of the two tribes under Hezekiah from the forces of the Assyrians, after they had destroyed Samaria and carried captive the whole kingdom of Israel—But its full accomplishment must be sought for in the blessings which God vouchsafes to his people under the gospel dispensation—To illustrate it we must observe, that,

I. In the most degenerate times God has a remnant of faithful people

There has been no season when God has not had some faithful adherents

[In the antediluvian world all flesh had corrupted their way, and it seemed as if the very remembrance of God had been effaced from the minds of his creatures : but yet there was one small family who maintained their stedfastness, and openly acknowledged the true God—Before God separated the Israelites for himself, the world was again reduced to a state similar to that before the deluge : yet even then there were found an Abraham, a Melchizedec, a Job, and perhaps a few others

others connected with them—The times of Elijah were extremely degenerate : yet then, though he thought himself the only servant of God in Israel, there were seven thousand others that had never bowed their knee to Baal—Though therefore the knowledge of God has frequently been almost extinct, yet there never has been a period when he had not some to be his witnesses in the ages in which they lived—]

But at no time has he had more than a little remnant

[When first the twelve tribes were established in Canaan, piety prevailed among that nation more than at any other period : but there is no reason to imagine that the godly bore any proportion to the ungodly ; nor, if their whole nation had been pious, did they bear any proportion to the world at large—There were many converted in the days of the apostles ; and religion flourished far beyond what it ever did before or since that time : yet Christians were even then “like the gleanings of the olive, one or two upon the topmost boughs”—The name of Christ is indeed very widely spread ; but if his professed followers be sifted, how little true wheat would be found in comparison of the chaff!—Truly it is “a little flock,” “a remnant according to the election of grace ;” “though the nominal Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is only a small remnant that will eventually be saved”—]

Their state however is peculiarly happy ; for

II. While they honour God, God greatly exalts and blesses them

The terms used in the text import that God will be to his people a source of

1. Honour

[A crown is the highest honour to which an human being can aspire in this world—But how poor and contemptible is such a dignity, when compared with that which God confers on his people!—“He is not ashamed to be called their God :” He acknowledges them as “his sons and daughters :” they are the very “members of Christ’s body,” yea, they “are one spirit” together with him—While monarchs are surrounded by their nobles, the saints are attended by holy angels, who, as “ministering spirits, are sent from heaven to minister unto them”—When they go hence they have a crown of righteousness, and a throne of glory on which they shall sit with Christ at the right hand of God, in whose presence they shall “reign as kings and priests for ever and ever.”—“Such honour have all his saints”—]

2. Beauty

^a Rom. xi. 5. and ix. 27.

2. Beauty

[A crown is deemed the brightest ornament to the person that wears it; nor is any thing wanting to it that can increase its splendour—This idea is particularly marked in that a crown is called “a diadem of beauty”—But God puts a far brighter ornament around the head of his people: “He beautifies them with salvation;” He encircles them, as he did Moses of old, with rays of his own glory, insomuch that “his own glory is seen upon them”—A meek and quiet spirit is but a single grace out of many, with which they are endued; yet that is “an ornament of great value even in the sight of God” himself; what then must be the constellation of graces that form their character?—But what can God himself say more than this, that they are “renewed after his own image in righteousness and true holiness,” and that they are progressively “changed into his image from glory to glory by the agency of his almighty Spirit?”—Is the ornament of a glittering bauble worthy to be compared with this?—]

3. Happiness

[Men conceive that the possession of imperial honours must of necessity contribute greatly to their happiness: hence, if such a station be within their reach, there is nothing which men will not do to attain it—But supposing that all the satisfaction which men expect from their elevation were invariably attached to it, how much greater happiness does God impart to his chosen people! Their “peace passeth all understanding;” their “hope is full of immortality;” their “joy is unspeakable and glorified”—They are not indeed exempt from sorrows; but they have “joys with which the stranger intermeddleth not”—No tongue can declare the comfort they sometimes feel in a sense of the divine favour; nor can the heart of man conceive those joys which are prepared for them at the right hand of God—]

4. Security

[The idea of security attaches to the condition of a king, because, the instant that he is in danger, there are thousands at his command to rally round the throne, and to expose their lives in his defence—But if “the Lord of Hosts himself be our crown,” then are we secure indeed—And has he not said that “He standeth round about his people;” that “their place of defence is the munition of rocks^b,” that “He himself will be to them as a broad and rapid river that can neither be passed nor navigated^c,” yea, that “He will be a wall of fire round about them^d,” not only to protect their persons, but

to

^b Isai. xxxiii. 16.

^c Ib. ver. 21.

^d Zech. ii. 5.

to destroy all that would invade their peace?—Has he not assured us that “neither the power nor the policy of hell shall ever prevail against them?” and that “none shall ever pluck them out of his hand?”—Having HIM, they have all—If “none can separate them from his love,” their honour and beauty, their happiness and security, are as firm and immovable as God himself—]

INFER

1. How desirable is it to be found among the little remnant!

[Look at the greatest monarch upon earth; and the condition of Lazarus is infinitely preferable to his, unless he be among the number of God's people—Created glory, like that of Samaria, is but “a fading flower:” but if we belong to God, we have a portion, substantial in its nature, and everlasting in its duration—Let us then seek this portion with all earnestness through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—]

2. How little should we regard the scoffs and contempt of men!

[It is indeed “a small matter to be judged of man's judgment”—If God commend us as wise, we need not be concerned though men should account us fools—Time will shew, who are the truly wise, they who through the love of the world or the fear of man displease their God, or they, who face the frowns of the world and sacrifice its interests in order that they may please him—Indeed the ungodly themselves will soon alter their sentiments respecting these things^e—And, if a king upon his throne would not regard the ravings of a maniac who should conceit himself to be arrayed in royal majesty, so neither need we regard those who enjoy only the appearance of happiness, while we possess God himself for our crown of glory, and our diadem of beauty—]

3. How are we bound in our respective spheres to honour and glorify our God!

[Can we reflect a moment on such transcendent mercies, and not feel it our duty to walk worthy of them?—If any ask, How shall I requite the Lord? We answer, “Be ye a crown of glory and a royal diadem in his hand^f”—It is true, we cannot add to his honour, beauty, happiness, or security; but, as a diadem is that on which the prince looks with peculiar complacency, so may we be objects of pleasure and delight in the hand of our God—Let us then endeavour so to walk that we may be his boast; so to shine, that it may be seen to whom we belong; and so to honour him, that he may acknowledge us as his in the day that he shall make up his jewels—]

^e Wisd. v. 3—6.

^f Isai. lxii. 3.

CLXX. CHRIST THE SALVATION OF ISRAEL.

Isai. xlii. 12, 13. *Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness. I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.*

THEY who deny or doubt the existence of a Supreme Being, may discover his eternal power and Godhead by the works of creation, and ascertain his infinite superiority above all false gods, by the numberless predictions which he has given by his prophets, and the never-failing accomplishment of them in their appointed season—To this last criterion God himself refers idolaters in the chapter before us, and challenges them to bring any of their false deities, who should be able to stand in competition with him—To us, who acknowledge his unrivalled glory, there is one thing which displays, in a wonderful manner, the transcendent riches of his grace; I mean, the freeness with which his offers of mercy are made even to the most abandoned of mankind—This remark obviously arises from the words of our text; and will be fully illustrated by considering

I. The characters addressed

The words, in their primary meaning, are intended to describe those who were unhumbled by the judgments inflicted on them in the Babylonish captivity, and unaffected with his promises of deliverance from it—As applied to us, they comprise two common characters

1. Those who feel no remorse for their past sins

[All must acknowledge that they have sinned against God, and that, as sinners, they ought to humble themselves before him—But how many never call their past ways to remembrance, or say with themselves, what have I done^a!—Their sins give them no uneasiness: instead of mourning over their offences, they palliate them; and, instead of imploring mercy at God's hands, they deny that they have any need to deprecate his wrath and indignation—And must not such people be called “stout-hearted?”—If God himself complains of those, who represent it as a *vain* thing to serve the Lord, That “their words are stout against him^b,” surely the same complaint may justly

^a Jer. viii. 6.^b Mal. iii. 13, 14.

justly be made against those who practically declare his service to be a *needless yoke*, and an *intolerable burthen*—]

2. Those who are unconcerned about their eternal salvation

[Many, alas! are as improvident about the future as they are unconcerned about the past—They will profess indeed that heaven is a desirable portion; but they will never enquire seriously whether they be in the way to attain it; nor ever exert themselves in earnest to secure it—If an empty wish, or a formal round of duties, will suffice for the acquisition of it, they will be content to pay the price: but if they are to run as in a race, and to fight as in a single combat in order to have it awarded to them, they do not think it worth the contest—What now must we say of these, but that they are “far from righteousness and salvation?”—Surely, if they be far from a concern about these things, much more must they be from the attainment of them—]

When we reflect upon the characters here addressed, how shall we stand amazed at

II. The address itself

The prophet, in these words, foretold both the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, and the coming of their Messiah to save the world—To sinners of our day the text declares

1. That God has provided a Saviour for them

[Christ is undoubtedly that “salvation whom God has placed in Zion,” and whom we are commanded to call, “The Lord our righteousness”—Him has “God sent into the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”— — —Hearken to this, ye stout-hearted: though ye have despised your God, your God has not despised you; but has pitied your fallen state, and made provision for your restoration to happiness—Yes; for the angels that fell, he instantly “prepared” a place of unutterable and everlasting torment^c: but for you he prepared a Saviour, even his only dear Son—And shall not this make your obdurate hearts relent? Or will ye receive such stupendous grace in vain?—]

2. That God now offers salvation to them

[This salvation is nigh to all of us, and the tidings of it are now sounding in our ears—It is placed in this our Zion as much as ever it was in Zion of old—Christ is now present in his ordinances according to his promise; and will be so even to the end of the world—At this very hour he “proclaims liberty

^c Matt. xxv. 41.

liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound"—To you, even to you, ye stout-hearted, is "the word of this salvation sent"—Your past iniquities shall be forgiven, if only you will humble yourselves before him—Nor is this all: your God will not only restore you to his favour, but will "glory" over you with unutterable joy—"You shall be even a crown of glory and a royal diadem in his hands"^d—Let not then your hearts be yet hardened against him; but let his transcendent "goodness lead you to repentance"—]

ADVICE

1. Endeavour to see your obduracy in its true colours

[If you are free from gross sins, you think but little of an unhumiliated and impenitent state—But what can be worse than a seared conscience, and a callous heart?—What can be worse than to feel no sorrow or contrition for your past offences, no desire to please your God, no anxiety to save your souls?—Be assured that such a state, with whatever name it may be glossed over, is hateful in the extreme; and that, if continued in, it will prove as fatal as a course of open profligacy and profaneness—]

2. Fear lest God should give you up to final impenitence

[The present address, which is made by God himself, shews clearly enough, that he "has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live"—But he is an holy God; nor will his Spirit "always strive with man"—He may be provoked at last to "swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest"—This he most assuredly does with respect to many, who "grieve his Spirit" till they have altogether "quenched" his sacred motions—"To-day therefore, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts," "lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver"—]

3. Think what regret you will feel, when that salvation, which is now so near you, shall be removed to an unapproachable distance

[Of all the miseries that can afflict a soul in the future world, we cannot conceive any more distressing than the thought of having had a Saviour provided for us, and salvation through him offered to us—No words can express the sense which a self-ruined sinner will have of his folly, when he sees in one view the mercies he has slighted and the judgments he has brought upon himself—Now he can be "far from righteousness," and glory in his shame: but then he will see that, which even

^d Isai. lxii. 3.

even courted his embraces here, removed afar off indeed; so far, as to preclude a possibility of ever attaining the possession of it—The Lord grant, that they who have hitherto slighted these overtures of mercy, may now embrace them with their whole hearts!—]

CLXXI. CHRIST A GREAT SAVIOUR.

Isai. xix. 20. *They shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and He shall send them a Saviour, and a great One, and he shall deliver them.*

GOD usually vouchsafes his mercies when we are reduced to the greatest straits—

This is manifest in his most remarkable dispensations of providence and of grace—

In the greatest extremity God promised to send a deliverer to Egypt^a—

But there is a further reference to Christ as the Saviour of the Gentile world^b—

And it is in seasons of heavy dejection that He reveals himself to them—

To him therefore we must look as the Saviour foretold in the text—

I. In what respects He is “a great Saviour”

It is justly said by the Psalmist that “his greatness is unsearchable^c”—

Nevertheless we may, not unprofitably, endeavour to illustrate it

He is great when considered *in his own person*

[He has a name above every name either on earth or in heaven—

He is exalted to be a prince that can give repentance and remission of sins^d—

The

^a In this view it seems applicable to the angel who slew 185,000 of Sennacherib's army: for, though that deliverance was more immediately vouchsafed to the Jews under Hezekiah, yet in its consequences it extended to Egypt. Sennacherib had before conquered and ravaged Egypt; and it was most probable that if he had taken Jerusalem he would have again proceeded thither with his victorious army, and reduced that already desolated kingdom to the lowest ebb of misery. But perhaps there may be a further reference to some other deliverers.

text, ver. 18—25.

^b This appears from the whole con-

^c Ps. cxlv. 3.

^d Acts v. 31.

The voice of inspiration calls him, “ the great God and our Saviour^e—

He speaks of himself in terms of similar import^f—

Nor can any thing be more glorious than the description given of him by the prophet^g—]

He is also great in respect of *the salvation he has wrought out for us*

[Who can count the number of the sins from which he has delivered us?—

Or estimate the misery from which he has redeemed us?—

Through our whole lives we have been heaping up treasures of wrath^h—

Yet there is no condemnation to us if we be interested in himⁱ—

Besides, he has purchased for us an eternal inheritance in heaven—

We must know all the glories of heaven and the horrors of hell, before we can fully appreciate the greatness of his salvation—]

But before we speak peace to ourselves, it becomes us to enquire

II. For whose deliverance he is sent

Great as his mercy is, it will not indiscriminately extend to all—

They, for whose relief he comes, are “ oppressed” with the burthen of sin

[The generality, alas! are well contented with their bondage—

If he should offer to deliver them they would thrust him from them^k—

But there are some who mourn like the saints of old^l—

They desire nothing so much as to be delivered from their corruptions—

For these Jesus came down from heaven, and died upon the cross—

Nor, though they be lawful captives, will he leave them in the hand of their enemies^m—]

They at the same time “ cry earnestly to the Lord” for deliverance

[There are some, it must be confessed, who are uneasy in their

^e Tit. ii. 13.

^f Isai. xlv. 22.

^g Isai. ix. 6.

^h Rom. ii. 5.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 1.

^k Acts vii. 37, 39.

^l Isai. vi. 5. Rom. vii. 24.

^m Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

their sins, yet do not with fervour and constancy implore his mercy—

Such therefore, notwithstanding their uneasiness, obtain no help from him—

His mercy is promised to those alone who seek it with importunityⁿ—

But humble and believing suppliants shall never be rejected by him—

They shall find him a great, compassionate, and all-sufficient Saviour—]

APPLICATION

[Let *those who are unconcerned about their sins* reflect on their state—

Would God have sent them *such a Saviour* if their condition had not required it?—

Or, will they take occasion from this grace to live more securely in their sins?—

Let them consider that their cries, however available now, will soon be of no effect^o—

Let *those who are conflicting with sin and Satan* lift up their heads with joy—

However desperate their state may seem, their redemption draweth nigh—

Nor shall all the powers of darkness rescue them from their Redeemer's hands^p—

Let *those who have experienced deliverance* adore their Lord—

Let them still go on, “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”—

And soon they shall join in eternal Hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb—]

ⁿ Matt. vii. 7. Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^o Luke xvi. 24, 25,

^p John x. 28.

CLXXII. THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Jer. xxiii. 6. *This is his name, whereby he shall be called,*
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE writings of the prophets no less than of the apostles testify of Christ: nor can we any where find a truer exhibition of his character than in the words before us—As to *his origin*, he is “a branch from the root of David;” and, in *his character*, “a righteous” branch. *His*

office is that of “a King;” and, as to *the manner in which he executes that office*, “he executes righteousness and judgment in the land.” Look we for *the effects of his administration*? “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely.” Lastly, Would we know *in what light he is to be regarded*? “This is his name, whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.”

In these words the prophet sets forth

I. The dignity of Christ

The inspired writers never seem afraid of speaking of Christ in too exalted terms—The prophet, in this very place, declares

1. His essential dignity

[There is frequent occasion to observe that, wherever the word LORD is printed in large characters, it is in the original, JEHOVAH. Now Jehovah denotes the self-existence of the Deity, and is a name incommunicable to any creature: yet is it here assigned to Christ—By comparing similar declarations in the Old Testament with the expositions given of them in the New, we know assuredly that this name belongs to Christ; and that therefore he is and must be “God over all, blessed for ever^a”—]

2. His official dignity

[The title of Jehovah belongs equally to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; but the additional title of “*Our Righteousness*” is peculiar to Christ alone—It imports that Christ has by his own obedience unto death wrought out a righteousness for guilty man; and that “this righteousness shall be unto all and upon all them that believe in him”—It is in this sense that St. Paul speaks of him as “made unto us righteousness^b”—

The connexion between the different parts of this comprehensive name deserves particular notice: for, if He were not Jehovah, he could not be our Righteousness; seeing that as a creature, he could *merit* nothing; because he would *owe* to God all that he could do; and, “after he had done all, he would be only an unprofitable servant:” but as he is God, all which he does is voluntary; and his divinity stamps an infinite value upon his work; so that it may well merit, not for himself only, but for a ruined world—

Such

^a Isai. vi. 5. with John xii. 41. or Isai. xlv. 22, 23. with Rom. xiv. 10, 11. or Joel ii. 32. with Rom. x. 13, 14. or Mal. iii. 1. with Luke i. 76.

^b 1 Cor. i. 30.

Such is the dignity of our blessed Lord : He is Jehovah, one with the Father, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal : nor is there one ransomed soul in heaven, who does not ascribe his salvation to the blood and righteousness of this our incarnate God—]

While the prophet thus expatiates on the glory of Christ, he intimates also

II. The duty of man

Our duty as sinners, and as redeemed sinners, has especial respect to Christ : and it is summarily comprehended in the ascribing to Christ the honour due unto his name—But this must be done

1. In faith

[To compliment Christ with any titles which we do not believe due to him, would be to insult him, like those who arrayed him in mock majesty, and cried, Hail, King of the Jews—We must fully believe him to be God : we must be persuaded that we neither have nor can have any righteousness of our own : and we must be assured that “ He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth ”—If we entertain any idea of meriting any thing at God’s hands by our own obedience, or of adding any thing of our own to his perfect righteousness, we dishonour and degrade him ; and, instead of performing our duty towards him, we violate it in the most flagrant manner : and, though we may be actuated by a blind zeal for the Father’s honour, or for the interest of morality, we are indeed rebels against God, since he has commanded that “ all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father,” and that they should call him in faith, *The Lord our Righteousness*—]

2. In sincerity

[As, to give him a title which we do not believe due to him would be mockery, so, to give it without a correspondent regard to him would be hypocrisy—Do we believe him to be Jehovah ? we must regard him with reverential awe, and yield ourselves up to him in unreserved obedience—Do we believe him to be the only Righteousness of the redeemed ? we must renounce entirely our own righteousness, and depend on him with our whole hearts—Do we view him in his complex character as Jehovah our Righteousness ? We must rejoice in having such an almighty friend, such a sure foundation—We must glory in him as “ all our salvation, and all our desire”—A less regard to him than this, not only falls below our duty, but

but is absolutely inconsistent with any scriptural hope, any prospect of salvation—]

From this subject we may LEARN

1. The way of salvation

[There are but *three* ways in which we can conceive it possible for any man to be saved; namely, by works, by faith *and* works, or by faith *without* works; and the subject before us plainly declares which is the true one—Are we to be saved by our works? No: for God would never have sent his Son to be our Righteousness, if we ever could have wrought out a sufficient righteousness of our own—Besides, our own works would then have been our righteousness, and the name here ascribed to Christ would not have belonged to him—Moreover, even in heaven itself, instead of ascribing “Salvation to God and to the Lamb,” we must ascribe it to God and to ourselves—

Are we then to be saved by faith *and* works? We still answer, No: for in whatever degree we trust in our own works, in that degree do we rob Christ of his official dignity; and assume to ourselves the honour due to him alone—As far as our own merits are united with his as a joint ground of our acceptance with God, so far shall we have to all eternity a ground of glorying in ourselves; yea, so far salvation will cease to be of grace; whereas “it is of faith that it may be by grace, and that boasting may be for ever excluded”^d—

Salvation must then be by faith *without* works; we must not endeavour either in whole or in part to “establish a righteousness of our own,” but seek to be clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ’s righteousness—This is the declaration of God himself^e; nor did the apostles themselves know any other way of salvation^f—We must all therefore desire, with St. Paul, to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness but his^g—]

2. The excellency of that way

[What can be conceived more *comfortable to man* than to hear of such a salvation as this? Were we told that we must work out a righteousness of our own that should be commensurate with the demands of God’s law, who could entertain a hope of ever effecting it?—If we were required to do something that should be worthy to be joined with the Saviour’s merits in order to render them more effectual for our acceptance, where should we find one single work of ours that we could present to God as perfect, and as deserving of so great a reward?

^d Rom. iv. 16. Eph. ii. 8, 9.
Gal. ii. 16.

^e Rom. iv. 5.
^f Phil. iii. 9.

reward?—The best man on earth must either sit down in despair, or live in continual suspense respecting his eternal welfare—But the righteousness of Jehovah appears at once, not only adequate to our wants, but to the wants of all mankind; and, by trusting in that, we find rest unto our souls—Nor can we devise any other method of acceptance so *honourable to God*; since it refers all the glory to him; and necessitates all the hosts of the redeemed to ascribe the honour of their salvation to him alone—In spite of all the objections too that are urged against it, we can affirm that it is eminently *conducive* to the practice of *holiness*—Can we think of God becoming man in order to work out a righteousness for us, and not feel a desire to serve and honour him? “Can we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid”—An inspired writer assures us that “the grace of God which bringeth salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world” —

Let us then seek our righteousness in Christ alone; but let us shew by our lives, that this doctrine of faith is indeed “a doctrine according to godliness”—]

CLXXIII. CHRIST'S INCARNATION A CALL TO WORSHIP HIM.

Heb. i. 6. *When he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*

IF God had been pleased to try our faith, he might have required us to believe whatsoever he should reveal, even though he should mention it but once: but, in condescension to our weakness, he has given us a great variety of testimonies to confirm every fundamental doctrine of our holy religion—The doctrine of the divinity of Christ is as important as any in the whole Bible: and it stands, not on one or two doubtful passages of scripture, but on the plainest, and almost numberless declarations of the inspired writers—In the passage before us the apostle is shewing the infinite superiority of Jesus above the highest orders of created beings; and he adduces a whole series, as it were, of testimonies in proof of this point—The one which we have now read is taken from the 97th Psalm, and confessedly relates to Jesus^a—In discoursing upon it we are led to observe

I. That

^a It speaks of Christ's kingdom, ver. 1. and the duty of angels, here called gods, to worship him, ver. 7.

I. That Christ is a proper object of divine worship

The command contained in the text is itself decisive upon the point

[God is a jealous God, and claims divine worship as his unalienable prerogative^b; yet he at the same time requires it to be given to his Son—Would he do this, if his Son were not worthy of that high honour? Would he, contrary to his express declaration, give his glory to another^c? We are assured he would not; and therefore his Son must be a proper object of our supreme regard—]

The practice of the Christian church confirms it beyond a doubt

[Stephen, when he was full of the Holy Ghost, and his face shone like that of an angel, at the very instant that he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, addressed himself, not to the Father, but to Jesus; and *that* too in terms precisely similar to those in which Jesus in his dying hour had addressed the Father^d—Can we wish for any plainer example?—The apostle Paul, under the buffetings of Satan, applied to Jesus for relief, and was expressly answered, as he himself tells us, by Jesus; in consequence of which answer he from that time “gloried in his infirmities that the *power of CHRIST* might rest upon him^e”—The whole church of God, not only at Corinth, but “in all other places,” are described and characterized by this very thing, the worshipping of Christ^f—But the church triumphant no less than the church militant are incessantly presenting before him their humble and grateful adorations^g—

Surely if worship be not to be paid to Christ, the scriptures are not calculated to instruct, but to deceive and ensnare us—]

Nor must it be forgotten, that to worship Christ is the highest act of obedience to the Father

[It is the Father who enjoins it in the text; and *that*, not to men only, but to angels also—“He has committed all judgment to his Son *for this very purpose*, that all men may honour the Son even as they honour the Father^h”—He even swears that all, at the peril of their souls, shall bow to Jesusⁱ; and, so far from thinking himself dishonoured by it, he expressly requires it, in order that he himself may be more abundantly glorified^k—]

The text leads us further to observe respecting Christ

II. That

^b Matt. iv. 10.

^c Isai. xlii. 8.

^d Compare Acts vii 59, 60. with Luke xxiii. 34, 46.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

^f 1 Cor. i. 2.

^g Rev. vii. 9, 10.

^h John v. 22, 23.

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

^k Phil. ii. 10, 11.

II. That his incarnation affords a special call to all both in heaven and earth to worship him

“The bringing in of the first-begotten into the world” may comprehend the whole period of his reign under the gospel dispensation; in which case the command to worship him is *general*: but if we confine the expression to the time of his incarnation, the command to worship him will be a *special* call, arising from the circumstance of his incarnation, and founded on it—To elucidate it in this latter view we may observe that

1. It affords the brightest discovery of the divine perfections

[The angels had doubtless seen much of the divine glory before: they had seen God’s wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation and government of the world. But they never before had such a view of his condescension and grace as when they beheld him lying in the manger, an helpless babe—Now also the design of God to glorify all his perfections in the work of redemption was more clearly unfolded—Hence the whole multitude of the heavenly choir began to sing, “Glory to God in the highest”—And if their hosannas increased with their discoveries of the divine glory, should not ours also?—Have not we also abundant reason to magnify our incarnate God; and to exalt our thoughts of him in proportion as he has debased himself for our sakes?—]

2. It opens a way for our reconciliation with God

[Men were indeed accepted of God before Christ’s advent in the flesh; but it was through him who was to come, as we are accepted through him who has come—But when Christ was manifested in the flesh, his mediatorial work commenced; and that course of sufferings and obedience, which is the meritorious ground of our acceptance, was begun—It may be said, that, though we are bound on this account to adore him, the angels feel no interest in it: but can we suppose that those benevolent spirits, who minister to the heirs of salvation, and bear them on their wings to the realms of glory, feel no delight in our happiness? Doubtless they do; and are themselves made happier by their sympathy with us—If they rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, they also have reason to adore the Saviour for opening both to us and them such an inexhaustible fountain of blessedness and joy—]

3. It reunites men and angels under one head

[Christ was the Creator and sovereign Lord both of men and angels¹—But man, by casting off his allegiance to his Lord,

lost

¹ Col. i. 16.

lost also his connexion with angels—Jesus however, by becoming man, gathers together *again*^m both men and angels under himself as their common head: yea, he comes, as it were, to the very gates of hell, that he may take from thence sinners of the human race to fill the thrones once vacated by the apostate angels—It is by no means improbable that the very same humiliation of Jesus that exalts men to glory, is the source of establishment to the angels that retained their innocence—At all events, the restoration of their Lord to the honour of which man by transgression had deprived him, and their communion with man in the benefits conferred upon him, cannot fail of exciting in their breasts the liveliest emotions of gratitude—Indeed, we see that this is no fanciful idea, since it is realized in heaven, where saints and angels join in one general chorus, ascribing “salvation to God and to the Lambⁿ”—]

To ENFORCE then the injunction we have been considering, we would say

1. Welcome him

[Let not his advent be regarded with indifference; but welcome him with acclamations and hosannas—The captious Pharisees may indeed condemn you; but if you neglect to honour him thus, the very stones will cry out against you^o—]

2. Submit to him

[Jesus comes, not merely to save mankind, but to set up his kingdom in the world—Let your hearts then, yea, “the very thoughts of your hearts, be brought into a willing captivity to him”—“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish^p :” and present your offerings before him in token of your allegiance to him, and your unreserved subjection to his will^q—]

3. Depend upon him

[He is that nail in a sure place on which are to be hanged all the vessels of his Father’s house^r—Trust then on him; and let his vicarious sufferings and obedience be the stay and support of your souls—]

4. Glory in him

[Since he is the boast of all in heaven, let him be the boast of all on earth—Let the frame of your hearts be joyous, exulting, and triumphant^s—Thus from worshipping him below, you shall be brought to worship him for evermore in heaven—]

^m Ἀνα-κεφαλαιώσασθαι. Eph. i. 10.

^o Luke xix. 38—40.

^r Isai. xxii. 23, 24.

^p Ps. ii. 12.

^s See Isai. xlv. 23.

^q Rev. v. 9. 13.

^r Matt. ii. 11.

CLXXIV. CHRIST'S EXECUTION OF HIS PASTORAL OFFICE.

Ezek. xxxiv. 16. *I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*

THERE is no office under heaven so important as that of ministering unto men the gospel of Christ. But, alas! its importance is too little felt, and its duties are too negligently performed^a. There is, however, one shepherd, whose care and vigilance are without intermission. He it is, who, many hundred years before he came into the world, spake by the prophet, and declared the manner in which he would execute his office^b.

In the words before us we see

I. The different states of Christ's sheep

[All are considered as the sheep of Christ, who by name and profession belong to him, as well "the fat and the strong, who shall be destroyed," as those who shall be saved^c.

All without exception, while in their natural state, are "lost," straying from God, and ignorant of the way in which alone they can return to his fold^d. Some feel an inclination to enjoy his benefits, and at times resolve that they will turn from their evil ways: but they are "driven away" by the violence of their passions or the fear of man.

Of those that have been brought home to the fold, many, like David, are complaining of griefs and sorrows, more painful than a "broken" bone^e. And all are "sick" of sin, that loathsome malady which pervades all their powers both of body and soul, and incapacitates them for serving God as they would wish to do^f.

There are too many, alas! who are "fat and strong," in their own conceit^g. Were they really in good condition, they should not be "destroyed." But, like the Laodiceans of old^h, they deceive themselves; being really destitute of all wisdom, goodness, and strength, in exact proportion as they fancy themselves possessed of these things.]

II. The

^a See ver. 2—10.

^b Ver. 23.

^c John x. 16.

^d Isai. liii. 6.

^e Ps. li. 8.

^f Rom. vii. 18, 19, 21, 23, 24. Gal. v. 17.

^g It is in this sense that our Lord speaks of "the whole," and "the righteous." Matt. ix. 12, 13.

^h Rev. iii. 17.

II. The correspondent dealings of Christ with them

[Though in many instances our Lord displays his sovereignty in stopping the progress of most grievous sinners, while he suffers persons of more amiable deportment to wander further from himⁱ, yet all are to expect that he will deal with them in a perfect correspondence with their character.

He came from heaven in human flesh, and still comes in the preaching of his gospel, to "seek" and save "that which was lost." And if any, who have been "driven away" by the force of temptation or persecution, are desirous to put themselves under his care, he will gladly bring them to his fold, and protect them from every inward or outward foe^k.

As for those who are already in his fold, he will administer to all their wants, "binding up" the broken-hearted^l, and "renewing the strength" of those who are ready to faint^m. By the efficacy of his word, and the consolations of his Spirit, he will turn their sorrows into joyⁿ: and his grace shall be sufficient for them under all the trials they may be called to endure^o.

Willing as he is to pardon the very chief of sinners on their repentance, he will awfully punish the impenitent. The proud and self-sufficient, who despise his offers of mercy, shall surely feel his awful displeasure. He will "destroy" them as enemies both to himself and his flock: and, in order to their destruction, he will "feed them with judgment," giving them up to follow their own delusions, till they shall have completed the measure of their iniquities, and fattened themselves for the sword of his indignation^p. Yes; to eternity shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways^q, and feel the judgments which they would not deprecate^r.]

APPLICATION

1. Let us put ourselves under the care of this good shepherd

[The more we consider our state the more shall we see, that we are straying, or, at best, diseased sheep. But here is our comfort, that we have a tender and faithful shepherd that will forgive our wanderings, and supply our wants^s. Let us then return to him, if we are afar off^t; or, if he have brought us to his fold, let us rely upon his care and faithfulness^u.]

2. Let us imitate him to the utmost of our power

[Doubtless

ⁱ Acts ix: 1—6. Mark x. 21, 22. ^k Ver. 11—15. with John x. 10, 11, 28. ^l Isai. lxi. 1. 3. ^m Isai. xl. 29—31.

ⁿ Isai. xxxv. 1, 2, 10. ^o 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^p Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12.

^q Prov. i. 31.

^r Isai. l. 10, 11.

^s Isai. xl. 11,

^t 1 Pet. ii. 25.

^u Ps. xxiii. 1—3.

[Doubtless it is in the first place the duty of *ministers* to follow the steps of this great shepherd, because his flock is more immediately committed to their care*. But it is also the duty of every one in his place and station to exert himself to the utmost to enlarge and edify the flock of Christ. And, if we were more diligent in our respective spheres, how many might be reduced from their wanderings, or strengthened in their difficulties, or comforted in their troubles! We know not how useful a word in season might prove. "Let us then, as the elect of God, put on bowels of mercies," and shew our relation to Christ by our conformity to his image.]

* If this were the subject of a *Visitation* or *Ordination* Sermon, this thought should be prosecuted at some length, in reference to the whole preceding part of the chapter.

CLXXV. THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST TOWARDS THE WEAK.

Matt. xii. 18—21. *Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in him shall the Gentiles trust.*

ONE might gather almost as complete a character of Christ from the prophecies as from the gospels themselves—

Not only the great incidents relating to his life and death were foretold, but his spirit and conduct were most minutely delineated—

He had just withdrawn himself from the Pharisees who sought to destroy him—

And had strongly enjoined his attendants not to make known his miracles—

This conduct appeared strange to those, who were expecting him to erect a temporal kingdom—

But the Evangelist declares that these very things had been made the subject of prophecy many hundred years before—

The passage quoted by him from Isaiah is recorded, not with literal exactness, but according to its true import—It declares

I. The

I. The commission given to Christ

Christ was the Father's ambassador to our ruined world

[However, in his divine nature, Christ was equal to the Father, yet, in his mediatorial capacity, he was the Father's servant—

The office assigned him was to shew judgment, that is, the way of righteousness and salvation both to Jews and Gentiles—

And for this he was qualified by an immeasurable communication of the Spirit to him^a—]

In this view the Father exceedingly delighted in him

[The Father doubtless regarded him as his beloved *for his own sake*—

But was peculiarly pleased with him as having undertaken the work of man's redemption—

In him he saw, as it were, all his own perfections glorified, and the thrones of apostate angels occupied by sinners of the human race—

Hence in triumphant exultation he declares his acquiescence in him, and calls every human being to “behold” him—]

The prophet further specifies

II. The manner in which he should execute it

He was to accomplish his work

1. Silently

[There was to be nothing in him ostentatious, contentious, or clamorous—

Together with firmness and fidelity, he exercised continued gentleness and meekness^{aa}—

Would to God that many who bear a similar commission would learn of him to execute it in a similar way!—]

2. Tenderly

[The terms here used seem to be proverbial—

The former metaphor is taken from reeds, which were used as musical instruments by shepherds, and which, when bruised, could no longer emit any melodious sound—

The smoking flax alludes to the wick of a lamp which, when the flame is extinct, produces an offensive smell—

Both these metaphors fitly represent the state of a soul bruised under a sense of sin, and lamenting that its grace is nearly extinguished while whole clouds of corruption are arising from it—

But

^a John iii. 34. Isai. xi. 2, 3.

^{aa} His conduct, as related in the context, strongly illustrates this.

But Jesus, instead of despising its low estate, will rather fan the spark into a flame, and cause the worthless reed to send forth melody that shall delight the ears of God himself—]

3. Successfully

[However gentle his exertions, he shall never ultimately fail—

As his forbearance towards his enemies gave them a momentary appearance of triumph, so he sometimes delays his aid even to his most favoured people—

But he will at last prevail, and make his grace victorious in their souls—]

To this description of the Saviour the prophet naturally subjoins

III. Our duty towards him

Blessed be God, our duty is our highest privilege—

We are commanded to trust in him

1. For instruction

[Jesus is both qualified and commissioned to enlighten the Gentiles ^b—

Nor are there any so weak and ignorant but that he can make them wise to salvation ^c—

Let us then, “not lean to our own understanding,” but seek to be “taught of him ^d”—]

2. For acceptance

[It is not merely in his individual capacity, but as the head of the elect world, that he is so pleasing to his heavenly Father—

We therefore, if we believe on him, may be certain of acceptance through him ^e—

Yea, God will not behold a spot in the most polluted soul, if it be only washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness ^f—]

3. For victory

[None have need to despond on account of their own weakness and corruptions—

The “grace of Christ is sufficient,” and shall prove so to all who trust in him—

“Wherever he has begun the good work he will carry it on unto the end ^g”—]

APPLICA-

^b Luke i. 78, 79. and ii. 32.

^d Eph. iv. 20, 21.

^f Eph. v. 27. Jude 24.

^c Matt. xi. 25.

^e Eph. i. 6, 10.

^g Phil. i. 6. Rom. viii. 37.

APPLICATION

1. The text is addressed to *all the sinners of the Gentiles*

[How gracious is God in thus inviting sinners to “behold” his Son!—

And how powerful the recommendation that is thus enforced by the example of God himself!—

But can any thing be a stronger reproof to those, who, instead of choosing Christ, and being well pleased with him, have uniformly despised and rejected him?—

Say then, ye ungrateful world, whom will ye condemn; yourselves, or God?—

Still however, the invitation is addressed to you, “Behold my Son”—

O that you may behold him now to your joy, and not hereafter to your confusion!—]

2. But the words are more eminently suited to *the weak and desponding*

[More consolatory declarations could not have been desired by man, or given by God—

The lowest possible state of grace is here described in most appropriate terms—

And an assurance given that it shall prove victorious in the issue—

Let the desponding soul then learn to “trust” in Jesus—

And even in the midst of conflicts sing, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”—]

C LXXVI. CHRIST A SUITABLE AND ALL-SUFFICIENT HELP.

Isai. xxv. 4. *Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.*

IT is generally thought that no great comfort can arise from meditating upon God : and this is true, as far as it respects those who are determined to live in sin : but to those who desire to serve and enjoy God, there cannot be a richer source of consolation : a view of his attributes, as displayed in the works of his providence and grace, would soon elevate our minds, and turn our fears and sorrows into “thanksgiving and the voice of melody”—We find the prophet breaking forth into rapture, “O Lord, thou art my God ; I will exalt thee ; I will praise thy

thy name:" but what was the foundation of this joy? It was, as he adds, "for thou hast done wonderful things^a:" and what those wonders were, he informs us in the words which we are about to consider—There are two obvious truths contained in them

I. God's people are often reduced to a state of extreme distress

We forbear to mention the temporal calamities which God's people are called to suffer, because they are common to the wicked as well as to the righteous—But there are many and severe afflictions peculiar to the godly—They are often in great distress

1. From a sense of guilt and danger

[When persons first begin to turn to God, they are often filled with horror at the sight of their past iniquities, and terrified with apprehensions of the wrath they have so justly merited—However "stout-hearted" any man may have been in the days of his ignorance, he no sooner sees what transgressions he has committed, and what a God he has defied, than, like Belshazzar at the sight of the hand-writing on the wall, his loins are loosed with fear, and his knees, as it were, smite one against the other^b—The jailor, it should seem, from his treatment of Paul and Silas, was of a very ferocious disposition; but, when God smote him with a sense of sin, how was his heart appalled! he "sprang in with trembling, and cried out before his prisoners, Sirs, What must I do to be saved^c?"—Thus it is, in a greater or less degree, with all: and many in this state have even envied the beasts the privilege of annihilation—]

2. From the persecutions of an ungodly world

[From the days of Cain, even to this present hour, they who have been born after the flesh have persecuted those who were born after the Spirit^d—And the more eminent any have been for piety, the more have they been the objects of the world's hatred and contempt—With what astonishing cruelty were the saints of old treated! They, of whom God says, the world was not worthy, were made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things^e—What though the same violence does not rage at present? is the enmity of the carnal heart slain? Does not the same aversion to religion exist now as in former times? and is it not still found in many instances that our "greatest foes are those of our own household?"—

Yes;

^a Ver. 1.

^b Dan. v. 5, 6.

^c Acts xvi. 29, 30.

^d Gal. iv. 29. 1 John iii. 12.

^e Heb. xi. 36—38. 1 Cor. iv. 13.

Yes; and in many instances is this a source of deep affliction, even as “a terrible blast, and as a wintry storm”—]

3. From the temptations of Satan

[“Whoever will set himself to seek the Lord must prepare his soul for temptation”—Satan will not lose any of his vassals without endeavouring to reduce them to their former state of subjection—For this end he will harass the soul with his temptations, which, as fiery darts, will inflame it with evil passions, and with a “venom will even drink up the spirits^f”—How inexpressibly grievous these are to a child of God, may be seen by the bitter complaints of Paul respecting that thorn in his flesh, and his intreaties for deliverance from the buffetings of Satan^g—Never does a saint feel himself more “needy and distressed” than in circumstances like these; nor could any endure this “conflict with the principalities and powers of darkness,” if not upheld by an invisible and almighty arm—]

4. From the hidings of God’s face

[God oftentimes, for wise and gracious ends, withdraws himself from his people, and suffers them to “walk in darkness for a season, and without light”—And this is incomparably the most distressing of all the trials that can be endured in this world—Our blessed Lord, who never complained of the cruelties exercised upon his body, cried out with inexpressible anguish, by reason of the dereliction he experienced in his soul, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me^h?”—Many too of his dearest children have mourned like him, and been ready to conclude that God had forsaken and forgotten themⁱ—To estimate aright the greatness of this affliction, it must be felt; for neither words can express, nor imagination conceive, the gloom and misery of a deserted soul—]

Were we to view them in this light only, we should dread, rather than desire, to be of their number

II. God however will afford them all necessary support

God is never more concerned about his people than when they are “in heaviness through manifold temptations:” nor will he merely afford them succour, but will himself be to them

1. A suitable help

[As the trials of the saints are various, so, of course, must their necessities be also: but whatever it be that they need, they shall surely receive it out of the Redeemer’s fulness—Is it a sense of guilt that oppresses them? God will “apply

to

^f Eph. vi. 16. Job vi. 4.

^h Matt. xxvii. 46.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.

ⁱ Isai. xlix. 14. Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

to their lips a live coal from the altar, and say, Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged^k—Are they bowed down under a weight of persecution, and destitute of human aid? He will strengthen them in their inward man that they shall even rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer for his sake—Are they buffeted by Satan? He will clothe them with armour, whereby they shall be enabled to resist him manfully, and to bruise him under their feet^m—And has he himself forsaken them? It shall be but for a little momentⁿ, that they may learn when in darkness to stay themselves on him^o, and rejoice with more exalted joy in the renewed expressions of his love—Thus it is intimated in the text itself, that whether it be strength or protection, or whatever else, that we want, he will surely impart it to us—]

2. A seasonable help

[God may suffer his people to lie a considerable time under their afflictions: but in the very instant that he sees it best to interpose, he will come to their support—This is not only intimated in the parable of the importunate widow, but absolutely promised, as a deduction from that parable; “shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, *though he bear long with them?* Verily I say unto you that he will avenge them *speedily*,” that is, in the very best and fittest season—And how remarkably was this exemplified in his conduct towards Abraham! That holy patriarch was made to go three days journey to the mountain where he was to slay his son; he was permitted to take the wood, the fire, the knife, for the execution of the divine command; he was even suffered to bind his son, and lift up the knife that was instantly to inflict the fatal stab; and then it was that God stopped him by a voice from heaven—Thus in ten thousand other instances has that proverb been verified, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen^p—And it is remarkable that the poor illiterate fishermen, who followed our Lord, were even ordered not to think beforehand what they should say, when summoned before their rulers, but to expect that the Holy Ghost should suggest to them at the moment what they ought to speak^q—And though their example does not justify a want of foresight and premeditation in us, yet the promise made to them warrants us to look to God as *an help*, a *present*, “a *very* present help in the time of trouble^r,” and to expect his interposition *then*, when “the storm” would otherwise overwhelm us—]

3. A suf-

^k Isai. vi. 6, 7.

^l Acts v. 41. ² Tim. iv. 17. ^m Eph. vi. 11.

ⁿ Isai. liv. 7, 8.

^o Isai. l. 10.

^p Luke xviii. 7, 8.

^q Gen. xxii. 14.

^r Matt. x. 19, 20.

^s Ps. xlv. 1.

3. A sufficient help

[However “needy and distressed” we be, God is able to support and deliver us—Though we be as “worms, yet will he enable us to thresh the mountains”^t—And though earth and hell conspire against us, yet will he make us “more than conquerors”—Our weakness is no ground of discouragement; for “his strength shall be perfected in our weakness”^u—He has undertaken for us, and he will perform his engagements: and, sooner than not make us triumph over our enemies, he would cause “the very stars in their courses to fight for us”^x; or the earth to open and swallow up our adversaries—Never has a child of God yet failed for want of his effectual aid; nor shall any one to all eternity: sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than “one of his little ones shall perish”^y—]

We may IMPROVE this subject by observing

1. How ignorant of God must they be, who are ignorant of themselves!

[To know God aright, we must know him experimentally as an ever-present and almighty agent interesting himself in the concerns of his people—We must know his readiness to answer their prayers, together with his wisdom and love, his power and faithfulness in supplying them with seasonable and sufficient aid—But what acquaintance can *they* have with these things, who are strangers to their own guilt and helplessness? a mere speculative knowledge indeed they may possess (for even the devils are not destitute of that) but while they think themselves rich and increased in goods, they are blinded by Satan, and need to “apply to Christ for eye-salve that they may see”^z: yea, because they say, we see, therefore their sin remaineth^a—]

2. What reason have we to be thankful for the gospel of Christ!

[By the creation, we may discern the power, and, by the law, the holiness of God; but it is by the gospel alone that we can behold his love and mercy: it is the gospel only that reveals his glory, as it is seen in the face of Jesus Christ—It is in Christ alone that he is the “Father of the fatherless, the husband of the widow,” and “Comforter of all them that are cast down”^b—Let then this gospel be precious to us; let us hear his voice speaking to us in it; and let it lead us to a more intimate acquaintance with our God and Saviour—]

3. What

^t Isai. xli. 14, 15. Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^x Judg. v. 20.

^a John ix. 41.

^c Matt. xi. 28.

^y Matt. xviii. 14.

^b Isai. xxxii. 2. “*A man,*” &c. that is, Christ.

^u 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^z Rev. iii. 17, 18.

3. What consolation is provided for us under all afflictions!

[Affliction doubtless is not, at the present, joyous, but grievous: but what blessed fruits does it often bring forth!—How little would any of us have known of God, if we had not been visited with temporal or spiritual troubles! how little conception could we have formed of his power and grace, if we had not seen their operation in the day of adversity!—Is there a godly person in the universe who must not say, It is good for me to have been afflicted?—Let then the troubled or tempted saint comfort himself with the thought, that God is a sure refuge, and that his trials are only the necessary discipline to prepare him for a richer discovery of the divine perfections, and a sweeter sense of the divine love—So will “patience have its perfect work; and we shall be perfect and entire, lacking nothing”—] *

* If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, we might in the place of these inferences substitute an exhortation to *admire*, to *trust in*, and to *imitate* our God; and, under the last branch of the exhortation, we might state the particular circumstances that called for relief, and urge those who have experienced blessings from God to impart them to others with a liberal hand.

CLXXVII. SECURITY AND COMFORT IN CHRIST.

Isai. xxxii. 2. *A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*

THERE is no greater blessing to a nation than a well-ordered government—The due administration of justice, together with the protection of our person and property, afford to any people a just ground of joy and thankfulness—Such a government did God promise to the Jews under Hezekiah—But a greater than Hezekiah is here—Under the figure of an earthly monarch, Christ is promised—And the text informs us

I. What blessings we enjoy in and through Christ

The metaphors, though four in number, suggest but two ideas

1. Security

[We have very little conception of winds and tempests in this climate—But the wind that rent the mountains before Elijah,

Elijah^a, and the tempest that desolated the land of Egypt^b, may serve to shew us how welcome a secure place must be to one who is exposed to such formidable dangers—Yet no storms on earth can fully paint to us the dangers to which we are exposed by reason of sin^c—But the Lord Jesus Christ affords us perfect security from them all—In him we have a Goshen where no hail can come, a mountain which the wind can never affect—The billows, which shall overwhelm the whole creation besides, shall not be able to destroy us—In Christ we have an ark that can never perish—]

2. Comfort

[We, in this quarter of the globe, know as little of excessive drought and heat, as of overwhelming storms and tempests—But the state of the Israelites in the wilderness^d, and of Jonah at Nineveh^e, may aid our conceptions—How delightful was the gourd to *him*, and how reviving to *them* were the streams that gushed from the rock!—And does not a soul oppressed with sin or persecution, or fainting with desire after righteousness, experience as much distress as they?—Behold then the preciousness of Christ!—He will be not only as a shade or as water to the weary and thirsting soul, but as “rivers of water” that can never be exhausted, and a “shadow of a great rock” through which the beams of the sun can never penetrate—Many can attest his excellency in these respects—Nor shall any who seek refuge in him be ever disappointed of their hope—]

But as these things are spoken of Christ as “a man,” it will be proper to shew

II. How we enjoy them in him as “a man”

Christ is truly and properly God—But he is God manifest in the flesh—

And it is to him as incarnate that we stand indebted for these blessings

1. As man, he died for our sins

[To his atonement we owe all our hopes of salvation—If he had not expiated our guilt we could never have obtained mercy—If he had not purchased for us the gift of the Holy Ghost, we never could have mortified our inward corruptions—But through his death we are freed from the apprehensions of wrath; and through his spirit we are filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy^f—Hence our song will ever be, To him

^a 1 Kings xix. 11.

^d Exod. xvii. 2, 3.

^b Exod. ix. 23—25.

^e Jonah iv. 8.

^c Ps. xi. 6.

^f Rom. xiv. 17.

him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and honour^g—]

2. As man he intercedeth for us in heaven

[As our peace was effected by the death of Christ, so is it maintained by his intercession—Now it is as man that he appears in the presence of God for us; and liveth on purpose to carry on this part of his priestly office—By virtue of this our persons and services find acceptance with God—Pardon is given us for our renewed transgressions, and strength is imparted to surmount our manifold temptations—Hence is our salvation justly ascribed, and *that* in a very peculiar manner, to his intercession for us^h—]

3. As man he is our head and representative

[Christ is the second Adam, the Lord from heavenⁱ—Our life is now treasured up in *him*, that it may no longer be exposed to the assaults of our great adversary^k—It has pleased the Father that in *him* should all fulness dwell; and that out of his fulness all should receive, who shall ever be partakers of his grace, or of his glory^l—Whether we want wisdom to guide us, righteousness to justify us, or sanctification to make us holy, we must look for all of it in and through Christ—As in Adam, our first covenant-head, all died, so in Christ, our new covenant-head, shall all be made alive^m—]

4. As man, he shall judge the world in the last day

[All judgment is committed to him because he is the Son of manⁿ—And what can tend more to our security and comfort than this?—Will he, who shed his blood for us, give up what he has so dearly purchased?—Or he who both interceded for us, and supplied our wants, consign us over to perdition?—Will he not rather bear testimony in opposition to our fierce accuser, and own the work he had wrought both for us and in us?—Doubtless, if we should feel a degree of security and comfort in having a very dear friend for our judge on earth, much more may we rejoice in having for our judge in the last day, him, who bought us with his blood and renewed us by his spirit—]

We do not mean to exclude his Godhead from this great work of redemption—It is that which gives efficacy to all which he did and suffered as man—But nevertheless it is as man, that is, as the God-man, that we feel our relation to him, and have access unto him as our sympathizing friend—

INFER

^g Rev. i. 5.

^h Heb. vii. 25.

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 45, 47.

^k Col. iii. 3.

^l John i. 16.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 22.

ⁿ John v. 27.

INFER

1. What objects of pity are they who have no interest in Christ!

[They are exposed to all the wrath of a sin-avenging God—And where, where will they flee for safety?—Where will they even procure a drop of water in that land of drought and misery, to which they shall be banished?—Alas! there is no protection but in this city of refuge; there is no water but in this fountain—O that men would consider what they shall do in the day of their visitation!—And flee for refuge to the hope that is now set before them°—]

2. How highly privileged are they who believe in Christ!

[They are not exempt from occasional distress either of soul or body—But they have an almighty friend to whom they can carry their distress—They go to him when heavy-laden; and find rest unto their souls—They feel themselves secure in their blood-sprinkled dwellings—But their privileges will not be fully seen till the last day—Then how happy in having a covert from the wrath that overwhelms the ungodly world!—Then to have their Saviour both for their witness and their judge!—Let us all cleave to him with full purpose of heart; and desire to know him more and more as “our friend and our beloved”—]

° Heb. vi. 18.

CLXXVIII. CHRIST'S COMMISSION.

Isai. lxi. 1—3. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.*

IMPORTANT as these words evidently are on account of the blessed truths contained in them, they come recommended to us with double force, from their having been made the subject of our Lord's first discourse after his entrance on his prophetic office—The interpretation of them,

them, which he has suggested, leaves us no doubt respecting the propriety of applying them to him ^a—While therefore we “begin at this scripture, and preach unto you Jesus,” we may truly say, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”—May the rehearsal of it excite amongst us, not merely a transient admiration, but a deep and permanent desire to enjoy the blessings revealed in it—The prophet speaking of the Messiah declares

I. His call to his office

Our Lord was consecrated to his prophetic office by a visible unction of the Holy Spirit

[As the priests and kings were separated to their respective offices by pouring of oil upon their heads, so, on some occasions, were the prophets also ^b—Our Lord, who, in all his offices, infinitely excelled all that had gone before him, was consecrated by an unction, of which the anointing oil was but a type and shadow—“The Spirit of the Lord God” was poured out upon him at the time of his baptism; and the descent of the Spirit in a visible shape, like a dove, upon him, marked him as divinely commissioned to execute the work and office of the Messiah^c—Indeed, he was called Messiah, and Christ, from that very circumstance of his being “anointed with the oil of gladness above all that ever had partaken” of that heavenly gift ^d—]

By that unction too he was qualified for the discharge of the office committed to him

[Though, as God, our Saviour was incapable of improvement, yet, as man, “he grew in wisdom as he grew in stature,” and needed to be furnished with those gifts and graces, which were proper for the discharge of his mediatorial office—Accordingly we read, that the “Spirit was given to him, not by measure,” as to other prophets, but in all his fulness^e; and that it rested on him as a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord^f—Thus was he both called and qualified at the same time: for though he was destined for his work from eternity, and prepared for it from his first conception in the virgin’s womb, yet were not his qualifications completed till the great seal of heaven was affixed to his commission, and he was openly consecrated to the service of God—]

The prophet proceeds to open at large

II. The

^a Luke iv. 17—22. ^b 1 Kin. xix. 16. ^c John i. 32—34.

^d Τὸς μύσχος αὐ. Heb. i. 9. with Ps. xlv. 7. ^e John iii. 34.

^f Isai. xi. 2, 3.

II. The commission given him

The terms, in which his commission are expressed, have especial reference to the jubilees that were proclaimed every fiftieth year—He was sent

1. To *offer* salvation to all who *needed* it

[At the time of jubilee all who had by any means been reduced to sell their estates, and to surrender up themselves and families as slaves to their creditors, were liberated from their bondage, and restored to the full possession of their inheritance, the very instant the trumpet sounded ^z—The gospel is that trumpet, and it proclaims “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;” and our Lord’s office was to sound this trumpet, to announce these glad tidings, to declare that this acceptable year was arrived, and that the “day” was come wherein God would take “vengeance” on all their enemies and oppressors—These are glad tidings indeed to those who are sensible of their bondage to sin and Satan, and who know that they have sold the inheritance of heaven for the pleasures of sin: but to those who are unconscious of their guilt and misery, the sound of the trumpet seems an empty noise, or rather, an insult, as implying a state of degradation, which they do not feel and will not acknowledge—Hence our Lord’s commission, though extending to all, was more particularly to “*the meek* ;” for it is to them only, who are humbled under their wretched condition, that the offer of a free salvation contains any welcome news—]

2. To *impart* salvation to all who *desired* it

[To “the broken-hearted, and the mourners in Zion” he came to “*appoint*” and to “*give*” the blessings they desired—He was expected as “the consolation of Israel;” and, in that character, he particularly appeared—Were any bowed down with “a spirit of heaviness,” and “mourning in” dust and “ashes?” he came to “bind up their broken hearts,” and to exhilarate their souls; that they might be comforted, and become as persons anointed with oil, and arrayed in gayest apparel for some great festivity ^h—We may conceive the feelings of a man who in one instant has been restored, from the lowest degree of servitude and want, to affluence and honour; but we must experience the blessedness of salvation, before we can form any adequate idea of the joy and gladness which Christ infuses into the contrite and believing soul—]

Thus

^z Lev. xxv. 10, 41.

^h There is in the original a paronomasia which cannot be expressed in a translation; he will give *Phcar* for *Ephar*, that is, “beauty for ashes.”

Thus far our Lord himself applied the passage: but the prophet adds

III. The ends for which he executes this commission

Our Lord in every part of his work connected two great ends

1. The benefit of man

[Though “once we were planted a noble vine, we are become the degenerate plants of a strange vine; and instead of producing good fruit, we bring forth nothing but grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrahⁱ”—But Christ desires to rectify our fallen nature, and to make us “trees of righteousness”—that, “instead of the thorn may grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier, the myrtle-tree^k,” that so we may be as trees “planted and watered by the hand of God”—This was the end of his mission; and it is invariably the effect of his ministration—Let us only view the converts on the day of Pentecost, and in them we shall behold a just specimen of the effects produced by the preached gospel: and, to whomsoever the word of Christ comes with power, the same blessings are given; they are transplanted from the wilderness into the garden of the Lord, and “they have their fruit unto holiness, and their end everlasting life”—]

2. The glory of God—

[This could not but be the great end which Jesus ever had in view: he had sinned if there had been any consideration in his mind superior or even comparable to this—And how well was his commission calculated to promote it! view him as undertaking our cause, and coming from heaven to redeem us; can we fail of admiring the love and condescension of that God who sent him?—Hear the tidings he proclaims; a full, a free, an everlasting salvation to perishing sinners; are we not filled with wonder at such stupendous mercy?—See the myriads whose broken hearts he has healed; see them rejoicing on earth, or shouting their hallelujahs in heaven; are we not ready to clap our hands for joy, and to break forth into acclamations and hosannahs?—There is not any part of Christ's work, whether as performed by him, or enjoyed by us, but what calls upon us to glorify God with our whole hearts: and to all eternity will the praises of God resound from myriads of the redeemed, who, with united voices, will exclaim, “Blessing and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever^l”—]

This subject may be IMPROVED

1. For

ⁱ Jer. ii. 21. Deut. xxxii. 32. ^k Isai. lv. 13. ^l Rev. v. 13.

1. For conviction

[All profess to hope for salvation through Christ, even though they be insensible of their lost and helpless state—But, if it be to the meek, the mourners, and the broken-hearted, that Christ came, what can they have to do with him, whose hearts are whole, and who are unhumbled before him?—"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: nor did he come to call the righteous, (those who fancy themselves righteous) but sinners to repentance"—Let none then expect to participate his salvation, unless they feel their need of it, and consent to receive it as his free unmerited gift—]

2. For consolation

[They who are sensible that they have sold heaven and their own souls "for a thing of nought," are ready to say, "Can such a lawful captive ever be delivered^m?"—We answer, You may instantly cast off your bonds and assert your liberty, if you will but accept the proffered mercy—Only believe in Christ, and the forfeited inheritance of heaven shall be yours—Arise then, and sing, thou that sittest in the dust; put off thy sackcloth, and gird thee with gladness—Be not afraid, as though the tidings were too good to be true: the jubilee is come, and the trumpet now sounds by the command of God himself: you have not to pay any thing for your deliverance; but to receive it freely: you have nothing to fear from your enemies; for "the day of God's vengeance is come," and he will bruise all your enemies under your feet—Let but these tidings sink into your hearts; and God will glorify himself in your eternal happiness—]

^m Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

CLXXIX. THE EXTENT OF CHRIST'S COMPASSION.

Ps. cxlvi. 7, 8. *The Lord looseth the prisoners: the Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous.*

AS David was a very eminent type of Christ, so was he inspired to prophesy of Christ: and, if we look no further than to the passages quoted out of the Psalms in the New Testament, we shall find, that he wrote as fully and as minutely respecting the Messiah, as any other prophet whatever, not excepting even Isaiah himself. He

described *his person* as God and man^a. He declared the whole of *his work*, his first covenant engagements with the Father^b, his incarnation^c, together with his active obedience^d, and his unparalleled sufferings unto death^e. He foretold his resurrection^f, and ascension^g; his session at the right hand of God^h, and his final appearance to judge the worldⁱ. He proclaimed also *his offices*, as a prophet^k, priest^l, and king^m. We do not indeed find the Psalm that is before us expressly cited in the New Testament: but the whole of it so accords with what is elsewhere spoken respecting himⁿ, and the very words of the text are so descriptive of what Christ himself declared to be the great end of his mission^o, that we can feel no hesitation in interpreting it as relating to Christ.

In this beautiful description then of our Lord's compassion to man, we may observe

I. Its boundless extent

The calamities with which the human race are afflicted are very numerous; nor is there any trouble which the Lord will not either remove or sanctify, if we call upon him. But as the remedying of our *spiritual* maladies was the principal end of his coming, we shall direct our attention more immediately to them. In the words before us then we may notice his regards

1. To the blind and willing slaves of sin

[The world at large are in bondage to their lusts, and to that wicked one who leads them captive at his will; and they are shut up under a sentence of condemnation for their numberless violations of the law of God^p. Yet, so blind are they to their real state, that they cannot see, and will not believe it. Their cunning adversary has undertaken to be their guide,

but

^a Ps. viii. 4. with Heb. ii. 6. and Ps. cx. 1. with Luke xx. 42. or Ps. xlv. 6. with Heb. i. 8.

^b Ps. xl. 6, 7. with Heb. x. 6, 7.

^c Ps. viii. 5. with Heb. ii. 7.

^d Ps. lxxix. 9. with John ii. 17.

^e Psalms xxii. and lxxix. with all the accounts in the gospels.

^f Ps. xvi. 10. with Acts ii. 27.

^g Ps. lxxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8.

^h Ps. cx. 1. with Acts ii. 35.

ⁱ Ps. cii. 26, 27. with Heb. i. 12.

^k Ps. lxxviii. 2. with Matt. xiii. 35.

^l Ps. cx. 4. with Heb. vii. 17.

^m Ps. ii. 6. with Heb. i. 5.

ⁿ Compare Isai. xlii. 6, 7. and

xxxv. 5. with John ix. 32. and Matt. xi. 3—5.

^o Isai. lxi. 1—3. with Luke iv. 18, 21. N.B. *The foregoing passages are cited only for the satisfaction of the reader, and not with a view to their being incorporated with the discourse.*

^p Gal. iii. 23.

but has led them into the heart of the enemies country, and, if mercy do not interpose, into the very jaws of destruction^q. But the Lord Jesus is not an unconcerned spectator of their misery: he is ready to weep over them as over the murderous Jerusalem: and even while they reject him, he "would gladly gather them, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." He would give them an eye-salve, whereby they should be enabled to see clearly^r: he would cause their chains to fall off, and would say to them, go forth, and shew yourselves^s: yea, so desirous is he to exercise mercy towards them, that nothing but a determined rejection of his grace can involve them in final ruin.]

2. To penitents "bowed down" under a sense of sin

[Whatever be the afflictions under which we groan, we may carry them all to him, with an assured expectation of sympathy and succour, since he is at all times "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress^t." But if sin be our burthen, if a sense of guilt lie heavy on our conscience, if our indwelling corruption be to us as a putrid carcass from which we cannot get loose^u, and which causes us to loathe and abhor ourselves, we need not fear but that our Lord will soon come to our help: "He will never break a bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory." The sighs and groans of a contrite soul will surely enter into his ears, and call forth his almighty aid. He may indeed for wise purposes suffer the pressure to be heavy and of long continuance^x, insomuch that the weeping penitent may be ready to say, "The Lord will not hear, neither will the Almighty regard me:" but at the fittest season he will interpose, to revive the drooping spirit, and to "make the bones which he hath broken to rejoice:" "he will take the beggar from the dunghill to set him among the princes^y."]

3. To "the righteous" who are delivered from the power of sin

[They are justly deemed "righteous," who, in the habit of their minds, and the general tenor of their lives, are devoted to God. *Allowed* sin, of whatever kind it were, would exclude us from this number, and mark us as children of the devil^z: but if we be really clothed with the Redeemer's righteousness, and "walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit," we need not fear to take to ourselves this honourable appellation^a. And if

^q Alluding to 2 Kin. vi. 18—21.

^r Isai. xlix. 9. with Acts v. 18—20.

^s This is the idea alluded to Rom. vii. 24.

^x Ps. xxxviii. 2, 4, 6, 8, 21, 22. and cxlii. 6, 7.

^y 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8.

^z 1 John iii. 8.

^t Rev. iii. 18.

^u Isai. xxv. 4.

^a Rom. viii. 1.

if this character be ours, the Lord loves us, not merely as he does sinners in general, with a love of complacency : " he joys over us with joy, he rests in his love, he joys over us with singing^b." There is not any blessing which our souls can want, but his love will bestow it. We say not, That he will forbear to chasten us (for that would be a mark of hatred rather than of love^c) but, That he will deal with us in all things as a wise and tender parent, administering to us such things, in such a measure, at such a time, and in such a manner, as his unerring wisdom knows to be best for us.]

But we cannot rightly appreciate the Saviour's love, unless we notice particularly

II. Its unremitted exercise

Long before David existed in the world, our Lord had shewn forth all his love to his people in the wilderness; nor did he ever leave that ungrateful nation without abundant tokens of his regard. In the days of his sojourning on earth his whole life was spent in doing good to the most indigent and most unworthy. Nor has he yet suspended the exercise of his grace; he still manifests his regard to his people; and effects his purposes towards them

1. By his providence

[Wonderful are the ways whereby he accomplishes his own eternal counsels. The histories of Joseph and his family, and of Esther and the captive Jews, give us an insight into the things which are yet daily passing in the world. Many events appear to us casual and trifling; but the truth is, that not one is casual, not one is trifling; every the minutest circumstance is ordered by the Lord, and forms a link in the chain of his unerring providence. Not a hair of our head falls but by his appointment; and it remains with us to mark his dispensations with care, and improve them with diligence. Let any whose eyes have been opened, or whose souls have been liberated from spiritual bondage, look back and see the way by which they have been brought to the enjoyment of these mercies; and they shall find such a mysterious concatenation of causes and effects as will furnish them with matter of astonishment to all eternity.]

2. By his grace

[It is not said in the text that the Lord *had* done or *should* do those particular things ascribed to him; but he is spoken

^b Zeph. iii. 17.

^c Heb. xii. 6—8.

spoken of as actually doing them ; so that there is no day, no hour, wherein he is not engaged in this blessed work. He makes his word effectual at this time, no less than formerly, " to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." At this time also he heals the wounded spirit, and sheds abroad his love in the hearts of his faithful people. What if his word have not as much energy as in the days of the apostles ? or his spirit be not poured out in such an abundant measure ? " Has he forgotten to be gracious, or, in anger, shut up his tender mercies ? " Surely there are many in these days, who can say, I was once in bondage, but now enjoy liberty ; I was blind, but now see ; I was bowed down under a heavy load of temptation and corruption, but my strength has been renewed like the eagle's ; I once had no idea what was meant by the sealing of the Spirit, or the witness of the Spirit, but I have now received such tokens of my Saviour's love, as have assured my mind, that my " Beloved is mine, and I am his." Let it be known then that Christ is still communicating his blessings to his church, and that it is both our duty and our privilege to enjoy them.]

INFER

1. How great is the folly and wickedness of those who neglect Christ !

[If our maladies were of a bodily nature, and relief were offered us, should we not be deemed insane if we despised it ? And, if our Benefactor had put himself to great expence and trouble to procure us that relief, would our contempt of him be thought a light offence ? The application of this to our state is obvious. But let the energetic language of the text be marked : wherefore does the Psalmist no less than four times repeat the name of Christ ? Is it not the more effectually to call our attention to him ? and does not this in a very pointed manner reprove the sin of neglecting him ? If then we would not greatly multiply our own sorrows, and rush on blindly to everlasting destruction, let us seek to experience his proffered mercies, and to become the objects of his unalterable love.]

2. How little reason is there for any one to entertain desponding fears !

[The state of those who are immured in dungeons under a sentence of condemnation, or are deprived of the faculty of vision, may be justly considered as desperate in the extreme, and as representing in very gloomy colours the condition of men's souls. But there is nothing impossible with God : our adorable Saviour is both able and willing to effect deliverance : and, if, like the woman in the gospel, we have been bowed down

down under a spirit of infirmity for eighteen, or eighty, years^d, one word of his can instantly release us. And, if once we be interested in his righteousness, and renewed in the spirit of our minds, there is not any thing which we may not expect from him: if once he love us, he will love us to the end^e. Let none then say, There is no hope: but let us entertain worthy thoughts of our almighty deliverer: for, however much our expectations of mercy may be raised, we can never be disappointed, if we put our trust in him.]

^d Luke xiii. 11, 12.

^e John xiii. 1.

CLXXX. THE ADVENT OF JESUS A GROUND OF JOY.

Zech. ix. 9. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*

THERE is scarcely any circumstance relating to the life and death of Christ which was not made a subject of prophecy many hundred years before he came into the world—Even things the most improbable in themselves were predicted, that by their accomplishment the truth of his divine mission might be more fully manifest—That the words before us do indeed relate to him, is certain; because the voice of inspiration assures us that they were fulfilled when he entered into Jerusalem riding on the foal of an ass—In discoursing on them we shall consider

I. The description given of Jesus

In his office he is the “King of Zion”

[The whole universe is under his dominion, seeing that he is “King of kings, and Lord of lords”—But he is in a more eminent manner King of Zion, because all the members of Zion are his subjects *willingly* and by an unfeigned surrender of themselves to him—They gladly receive his laws; and he constantly affords them his protection—As the church in the wilderness was under a *visible* theocracy, so is the church in all ages, and every individual in the church, *really*, though *invisibly*, under the care and government of Jesus^a.—]

In his character he is the best of princes

He

^a Eph. i. 22.

He is just

[His justice appears in every law which he has enacted, and his righteousness in every part of his administration—There are indeed many things in his government, which we are not at present able to account for; but the day of judgment will clear up all the present obscurities, and manifest that every the minutest occurrence was ordered by him with unerring wisdom, goodness, and truth—It will then be seen that “righteousness was at all times the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins^b”—]

He is powerful

[Earthly kings may be just, yet not be able to screen their subjects from the injustice of others—But Jesus “has salvation” in his hand for all those who call upon him—Does sin oppress us? he can deliver us both from its guilt and power—Does satan assault and buffet us? “His grace shall be sufficient” for the weakest of his people—Does “the fear of death keep us in bondage?” He can make us triumphant both in the prospect of it now, and in a happy resurrection at the last day—]

He is lowly

[Great power and dignity are too often the means of engendering pride in our hearts—The kings of the earth would think it a degradation to converse familiarly with their meanest subjects—But our almighty monarch possesses a lowliness of mind, which makes him accessible to every subject in his dominions—There is not any moment when we may not enter into his presence, nor any complaint which we may not pour into his bosom—His ear is ever open to hear, and his hand ever stretched out to relieve his needy suppliants—The same lowliness which induced him, at his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, to ride upon a young ass, with no other furniture than the clothes of his poor disciples, when he might as easily have commanded all the pomp and splendor of an earthly monarch, still actuates him in his exalted state—There is no office to which he will not condescend for the benefit of those who wait upon him—]

From this description of Jesus we may well be prepared to hear

II. The exhortation to rejoice in him

The advent of such a prince is a proper ground of joy for all people

[When first he came in the flesh, the event was announced by angels as glad tidings of great joy to all people—And all the

^b Isai. xi. 5.

the multitudes who surrounded him at the time referred to in the text, were penetrated with the liveliest joy—And is there not now as much cause for joy as on either of those occasions?—Are not the great ends of his advent better understood now than at his incarnation? and the nature of his kingdom more clearly seen than at the time of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem?—Surely then our joy should far surpass all that could be experienced at those seasons—How should poor captives now rejoice to hear that there is one proclaiming liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound!—If an earthly king were coming not only to redress all the grievances of his people, but to relieve all their wants, and enrich them with all that their hearts could desire, would not all exult and leap for joy?—Would not every one be impatient to see him, and to receive his benefits?—Why then should not all rejoice in the advent of him, who is come to bind up the broken-hearted, and to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness?—]

But the “daughters of Zion” in particular should rejoice in this event

[The daughters of Zion are the true members of the church, who have been begotten by the Word and Spirit of God—These are addressed by the prophet, and are bidden to exult, and “shout” for joy—Well does the prophet select *them* as the persons to whom he should direct his exhortation—“Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed”—They know the glorious character of their prince—They have found both his laws and government to be “holy and just and good”—They have experienced his power to save, “to save to the uttermost those that call upon him”—They have continual proofs of his lowliness, being admitted daily to the most intimate fellowship with him—Should not *they* then rejoice? “Surely the very stones would cry out against them if they held their peace”—“Behold” then, believers, your king, even he whom you have chosen to reign over you, is come—He now waits for you—“Arise, lo! he calleth you”—Go, enter into his presence-chamber, and receive the blessings which he is come to bestow—]

APPLICATION

[Are there any who feel no disposition to rejoice in this event? Alas! too many, like Herod and the Pharisees, cannot join in the general chorus—Let them not, however, imagine themselves related to the church of God—They are daughters of the world, but not daughters of Zion—Nor need they have any other evidence of their alienation from God, than their want of joy in the Lord—How base is their ingratitude! that

the Lord of glory should come down from heaven for them, and they have no hearts to welcome his arrival—That they should be gratified with the company of an earthly friend, and have no delight in communion with Jesus—Surely if *they* were to have all the curses of God's law inflicted on them, who served not the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart on account of the temporal benefits bestowed upon them^c, they must have a far heavier condemnation, who so despise the condescension and love of our incarnate God—Mark then the alternative to which ye are reduced; ye must begin now that joy in the Lord which ye shall possess for ever, or, by continuing insensible of his mercy, continue destitute of any interest in it to all eternity—Choose ye now whether ye will have life or death—Remember, however necessary it may be at other times to weep for your sins, it is to joy that we now invite you; not to carnal joy, but to that which is spiritual and heavenly—We unite with the apostle in saying, “ Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again, I say, rejoice ”—Methinks such an exhortation should not be slighted, especially when your present joy is to be a certain prelude to eternal happiness—But if ye will still despise the mercies of your God, behold this king cometh shortly to judge the world—Behold he cometh riding upon the heavens with myriads of the heavenly host—Know too that he is *just* and *powerful*; but his justice will condemn, and his power punish you—Go to him then in this day of salvation, welcome him in this the accepted time—So shall you at his second coming behold his face with joy—And join the choir of heaven in everlasting hallelujahs—]

^c Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

CLXXXI. THE CHILDREN VINDICATED.

Matt. xxi. 16. *Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?*

THE wisdom of our Lord was very conspicuous in the answers he returned to cavillers—

He was thoroughly conversant with every part of the sacred writings—

From them he took as well his offensive as defensive armour—

In his conflicts with satan he invariably had recourse to them^a—

Nor,

^a Matt. iv. 4, 7, 10.

Nor, when assaulted by men, would he fight with any weapon which was not brought from that divine arsenal^b—

But every passage which he adduced was as an arrow from a well-directed bow—

This is well exemplified in the words before us—We shall consider

I. The occasion of them

Our Lord had just driven the traders and money-changers out of the temple—

And had healed multitudes of persons, who flocked around him for a cure—

The children that were there, surrounded him with acclamations and hosannas—

[They were struck with wonder at the authority and benevolence of Jesus—

And, doubtless, were both taught and actuated by the Spirit of God—

They therefore, when the adult persons manifested no disposition to glorify him, burst forth into shouts of praise—

They welcomed him as the Messiah that had been promised to that nation—

And expressed their ardent desire for the establishment of his kingdom—

What a glorious sight was this, to behold *children* thus occupied!—

How should it have stirred up others to an holy emulation!—

But on the proud and envious Pharisees it produced a far different effect—]

The Chief Priests and Scribes, filled with indignation, remonstrated with our Lord for suffering them to act in this manner

[They could not endure to hear these honours given to our Lord—

Nor was all their authority able to silence the triumphant choir—

They therefore, with sarcastic virulence, reproached our Lord himself^c—

Alas !

^b Compare Matt. xxvi. 51, 52. with John v. 39.

^c They could not mean to ask simply, “Whether our Lord heard what they said?” for he could not but hear. They insinuated that it was a disgrace to him to be pleased with the acclamations of weak silly children.—

Alas! what enmity is there in the heart against God!—

What will not afford a plea for prejudice to vent its spleen?—

The priests and Scribes should have been the foremost to encourage early piety—

Yet they were the first to repress what their “zeal should rather have been provoked” to imitate—]

Our Lord repelled their objection with an unanswerable appeal to scripture

II. The words themselves

The sense, rather than the exact meaning of the words, was quoted by our Lord^d—

They were understood by the Jews themselves as having a reference to the Messiah—

Nor did the priests attempt to invalidate the application of the prophecy—

The words, as quoted on this occasion, lead us to observe that

1. An appeal to scripture is the best way of answering all objections

[Many difficulties may be proposed, to which reason cannot furnish a sufficient answer—

But the scripture declares plainly whatever is to be believed or done—

If men will cavil at *that*, they contend, not with us, but with God—

There is doubtless much in a Christian's faith and practice, which natural men will account foolishness^e—

But he need not regard ridicule, if he have the word of God on his side—

“The word is, that sword of the Spirit,” which will enable him to combat all the prejudices of an ignorant and malignant world—

Nor can it ever be wielded in a more efficacious *manner* than it was by our Lord on this occasion—

Let every follower of Christ then adopt the rule prescribed by the prophet^f—

Thus

children.—If, by *παῖδες*, we understand servants and followers (as perhaps we ought) they were objected to as an ignorant mob.

^d David says, Ps. viii. 2. “Thou hast ordained strength.” But our Lord quoted his words, as the apostles after him frequently did, according to the Septuagint. The meaning is the same in both: God *manifests his strength*, and *glorifies his name*, in using weak instruments to effect his purposes.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^f Isai. viii. 20.

Thus will he, like our Lord himself, both disappoint and confound his adversaries—]

2. The exercise of devotion, however condemned by men, is pleasing to God

[The hosannas of the children were most probably regarded as the effusions of weak and uninformed minds—

Nor is the conduct of those, who *now* endeavour to exalt their Saviour, ascribed to any better cause than enthusiasm—

But our Lord approved and vindicated the pious efforts of the children—

In so doing he may be justly said to have “stilled the enemy and avenger”^z—

And sooner or later he will do the same for all his faithful people^h—

There is not any thing wherein he is more glorified than in their praisesⁱ—

Nor is there any sacrifice that they can offer, which is more acceptable to God^k—

Even the desire to praise him shall be acknowledged in the last day^l—

Nor shall so much as a word spoken to his honour, pass unrewarded^m—]

3. The weaker the instruments that advance his glory, the more is he glorified in them

[We should have been ready to think that the praises of the chief priests would have been more to his honour—

And we are now apt to suppose that the services of the rich and learned would glorify him more than those of the poor and ignorant—

But the very reverse of this is more consistent with truth—

If the wise and noble were most forward to honour the Saviour, we should impute their conduct to natural principles—

We should conclude that reason and education were the means of their conversion—

But when we see babes and sucklings well instructed in the things that are hid from the wise and prudent, we are constrained to ascribe the effect to graceⁿ—

Let none therefore say, I am incapable of glorifying God—

Or think that he despiseth the day of small things^o—

The prayer of the publican, and the mite of the widow, were more acceptable to him than many longer prayers and richer offerings^p—

And

^z See the close of Ps. viii. 2.

^h Isai. liv. 17.

ⁱ Ps. l. 23.

^k Heb. xiii. 15, 16.

^l 1 Kin. viii. 18.

^m Mal. iii. 16.

ⁿ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^o Zech. iv. 10.

^p 2 Cor. viii. 12.

And the weaker we are in ourselves, the more is his strength perfected in our weakness ^q—]

INFER

1. How earnestly should parents labour to bring their children to Christ!

[Parents are apt to neglect their children under the idea that their minds are not sufficiently expanded to receive divine knowledge—

But we read of many who were sanctified from their earliest infancy ^r—

We are expressly told that “of such is the kingdom of heaven” ^s—

The instance now before us is sufficient to encourage our exertions—

Happy will the parents be whose children are so educated—

And happy will those children be who in their early years are thus devoted to the Lord—

Let religious parents in particular make a conscience of his duty ^t—

And trust in God for the accomplishment of that blessed promise ^u—]

2. How inexcusable shall we be, if we do not praise and glorify Christ!

[The children had to oppose the example and authority of the priests—

Nor did they see much of the true character of our Lord and Saviour—

Yet they praised and adored him with all their powers—

But we see Jesus risen from the dead, and exalted to his throne of glory—

We know him to be indeed the Saviour of the world—

We too are exhorted and urged by every kind of motive to serve him—

How culpable then must we be, if we neglect to honour him!—

How will those children rise up in judgment against us and condemn us!—

Let us contemplate more the gracious acts that he has done—

Let us reflect on the interest we have, or hope to have, in his salvation—

And let us raise our hearts and voices to him in grateful adorations—]

^q 2 Cor. xii. 9. ^r Samuel, Abijah, Josiah, Timothy, John the Baptist, &c. ^s Mark x. 14. ^t Eph. vi. 4. ^u Prov. xxii. 6.

CLXXXII. CHRIST REWARDED FOR HIS SERVICES.

Isai. lii. 13. *Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.*

IN the writings of Moses, the enjoyment of the land of Canaan was held forth as the great incentive to obedience; and spiritual blessings were but obscurely intimated. But in the prophetic writings, the greatest of temporal blessings were promised rather as pledges of infinitely richer benefits, which they typically represented: and frequently the very language in which they were promised, clearly shewed, that their mystical sense was, in fact, the most literal. Sometimes, as in the prophecy before us, the inspired writer entirely loses sight of all temporal considerations, and is wholly wrapt up in the contemplation of that spiritual kingdom, which the Messiah was in due season to erect. From the redemption of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, he goes on to speak of a more glorious redemption to be effected for all the nations of the world from the dominion of sin and satan, of death and hell. The means of its accomplishment are described at large from this verse to the end of the following chapter. The Messiah, by whom it was to be effected, is set forth in all that variety of character which he was to assume, and in those diversified states of humiliation and glory which he was to pass through, in order to fulfil the work assigned him. That a passage so decisive for the establishment of Christianity should be wrested by the Jews, and be applied to any one rather than to Christ, is nothing more than what might be expected. But so harsh and incongruous are their interpretations, that they need only to be stated, and the absurdity of them immediately appears. Besides, the numerous applications of this prophecy to Christ, which occur in the New Testament, leave us no room to doubt respecting its true import. The portion, which now demands our attention, declares to us, first, his *success in his work*, and secondly, his *advancement after it*.

I. His success in his work.

The office which Christ sustained was that of a "servant."

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He was to do his Father's will, to seek his Father's glory, and to advance the interests of his Father's kingdom. On this account the scriptures frequently speak of him as a servant; "Behold my servant whom I uphold;" "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;" "I will bring forth my servant the Branch^a." Our Lord himself also often speaks of himself under this character: "I have not spoken of myself, says he, but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak^b." In above thirty other passages in St. John's gospel he represents himself as sent by the Father, and as receiving a commandment from him. We must not, however, conceive from hence that he is only a creature; for though in his official capacity he was inferior to the Father, in his own nature he was equal to the Father, as St. Paul tells us; "He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant^c."

Christ's work as a servant was, to *reveal the Father's will to mankind, to make atonement for their sins, and to reduce them to a state of holy obedience*; or, in other words, to execute the offices of a prophet, a priest, and a king, in compliance with the Father's appointment, and in subserviency to his honour. Now that he delivered his doctrines in the capacity of a servant, is evident from his own repeated confessions; "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me:" "Whatsoever I speak, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak^d." It was also in obedience to his Father's will that he offered himself a sacrifice for sin. Our Lord himself says, *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again: no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again: this commandment have I received of the Father^e:"* and St. Paul also says, that "being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross^f." Thus also in
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^a Isai. xlii. 1. and liii. 11. and Zech. iii. 8.

^b John xii. 4, 9.

^c Phil. ii. 6, 7. ^d John vii. 16. and xii. 50.

^e John x. 17, 18.

^f Phil. ii. 8.

the manifold exercises of his regal power, whether he cured diseases, rectified abuses, or forgave sins, he acted by an authority delegated to him for that purpose. When, at the very beginning of his ministry he took the sacred volume into his hands to read out of it to the people in the synagogue, he selected this passage, which fully declared to them by what authority he acted ; “ The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath *anointed* me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath *sent* me to heal the broken-hearted :” and at another time he told his disciples, that “ the Father had *appointed* unto him a kingdom.” Thus plain is it, that whether he executed the office of a prophet, priest, or king, he acted in the capacity of a servant.

In the whole of his work he prospered. The text says, “ My servant shall *deal prudently* ;” but in the margin of the Bible it is put, “ shall prosper.” This rendering of the word seems rather better to agree with the context, and with that expression in the following chapter, “ the pleasure of the Lord shall *prosper* in his hand.” The very same word also is used in reference to Christ by Jeremiah, where our translators have given this sense to it ; “ I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and *prosper*.” Let us view this servant of Jehovah in the various offices he performed, and we shall see that he prospered in them all. Was he *teaching the people* ? behold, what wonderful things he brought to light ; things, which from eternity had been hidden in the bosom of the Father ! How did the clouds of ignorance and superstition vanish before him ! the corrupt glosses, with which the Jewish doctors had obscured the law, were refuted : the truths of God were established on the firmest basis ; the most subtle objectors were put to silence ; the most ignorant were instructed in the deepest mysteries ; and all, with such condescension, such ease, such wisdom, and such authority, that his very enemies were constrained to say, “ Never man spake like this man.” Was he *setting up his kingdom* ? he rejected with disdain the pomp of earthly monarchs, and laid the foundations of his throne in the hearts of his people. Nor did he bring
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any into subjection by outward force: a single word was sufficient to subdue the stoutest heart. If he said to Matthew, "Follow me," not all the wealth of kingdoms could detain the willing captive. If he said, "Come down, Zaccheus," behold, a covetous extortioner is instantly transformed into a benevolent and obedient servant. Whomsoever he would, he called: and such was the constraining power of his voice, that, without hesitation, they left all that they had, and followed him. And though he commanded his subjects to make no account even of their own lives when standing in competition with his will, and promised them nothing but poverty and persecution in this world, yet they all delighted in his law, and gloried in the cross for his sake. So entirely did they yield up themselves to him, that opposition served but to rivet their affections to him, and to confirm them in their determination to live and die in his service. Did he *expiate his people's sins*? behold, there was not any thing wanting either to complete *his obedience*, or to fill up the measure of *his sufferings*. He fulfilled all righteousness, even though by so doing he made himself appear to be a sinner like unto us: he not only was circumcised by his parents, but voluntarily submitted to the ordinance of baptism, as though he had needed it for the washing away of his own iniquities. Nor was there any kind of suffering which he did not endure, that he might fully expiate our guilt by bearing in our stead all that our sins had merited.

But must we confine our views of his success to past or future times? Are there not many living witnesses of his power and grace? Is he not teaching some amongst us by his good Spirit, and "revealing unto babes the things that are hidden from the wise and prudent?" Do not many of us also experience the virtue of his blood, and reap the fruits of his continual intercession? Is not his almighty arm yet stretched out to deliver us from our spiritual enemies, and to bring our hearts into captivity to his will? Wherever there is one who is brought out of darkness into marvellous light, one who enjoys peace with God through the blood of sprinkling, and whose corruptions are mortified through the influence of divine truth,

truth, there is a monument of our Lord's success, "an epistle of Christ known and read of all men."

We might further illustrate his success by enumerating the benefits which his mediation has procured: but as these constituted a part of that reward which was conferred on him, we shall wave the mention of them in this place, and proceed to consider

II. His advancement after he had completed his work.

Our Lord, as a servant, "had respect unto the recompence of reward:" "for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross and despised the shame." Nor was this reward withheld from him, when he had finished his work. St. Paul tells us expressly, that his resurrection and consequent ascension are to be regarded in this view: "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; *therefore* God hath exalted him." Of this also the prophet spake in the words before us: "He shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high." Whether the prophet meant to point out three different steps of our Lord's advancement, we cannot positively say: but his words may well bear that interpretation; "he shall be exalted" by God to a throne of glory; "he shall be extolled" by men with adoration and thanksgiving; and he shall "be very high," reigning as Head over men and angels for ever and ever. In this view his advancement may be considered as *immediate*, *remote*, and *final*.

His *immediate* advancement consisted in his resurrection from the dead, and his elevation to the right hand of the Majesty on high, according to what is said by the apostle; "God hath highly *exalted* him, and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." He, who left his glory for our good, resumed it again; and his human nature is made to participate his glory: yes; that very body, which endured fatigue and hunger, which was torn with scourges, and pierced with nails, which agonized in the garden, and expired on the cross, is now at the right hand of God in the highest seat of dignity and honour. That human soul also, that once was harassed with the
temptations

temptations of Satan, and that endured the wrath of a sin-avenging God, is now assumed into such an union with the godhead, as to be exalted infinitely above the highest archangel. It is in his human nature that the brightest effulgence of the Deity is seen : so that, while he appears as a lamb that has been slain, he is the very joy and glory of heaven, the sun that illumines the regions of the blest ; “ the glory of God doth lighten them, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

And who does not rejoice that the Saviour should be thus glorified ? Who does not even leap for joy at the thought, that he, who loved us unto death, should be thus exalted far above all principalities and powers ? Surely, independent of the interest which we ourselves have in his advancement, we ought to be exceeding glad that our greatest friend and benefactor should be thus gloriously rewarded.

The next, and more *remote* step of his advancement was, the extending of his kingdom throughout the earth. It is true that, in a very short space of time, there were thousands of souls subjected to his dominion ; and gradually his empire was enlarged among the Gentile world : multitudes in every place took, as it were, an oath of allegiance to him, and were made willing even to lay down their lives for his sake. But yet his kingdom has hitherto been only partially established : there is a time coming when, in the most literal sense, that prophecy of Daniel shall be accomplished, and “ there shall be given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, and all people, nations, and languages shall serve him.” This methinks is that prospect, to which our Lord looked forward with peculiar delight as to “ the joy set before him.” When he shall see the whole human race bowing before his footstool, and hear them “ *extolling* ” and magnifying his name, he will look back upon the travail of his soul with pleasure and satisfaction, and account himself amply recompensed for all that he has done and suffered.

O that this glorious season might speedily begin ; that his kingdom might come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven ! But if we be not favoured to behold this period, let us at least make him the most acceptable

return we can for his kindness, by devoting ourselves to his service, and endeavouring to bring others to the obedience of faith.

The *final* step of his advancement will be, when he shall come again to judge the world, and reign over his elect for ever and ever. What he has already received is only a pledge and earnest of what he will hereafter enjoy. At a future period, fixed in the divine counsels, but known to no creature either in heaven or earth, he is to come in his own glory, and in the glory of his Father, surrounded with all the holy angels. He is then to summon the whole universe before him : all in one vast assembly, will stand at his tribunal, and be judged by him according to their works : those that were his enemies, and would not that he should reign over them, he will cast, together with the fallen angels, into the lake of fire ; but his faithful servants he will take, together with the holy angels, to dwell with him, that they may be one fold under one shepherd for evermore. His mediatorial office indeed he will then lay down, as having no more need to exercise it ; and, in this sense, “ he will deliver up the kingdom to God,” even the Father, that God may be all in all.” But he will not cease to reign as a king over his people ; for the prophet expressly says, that “ of his kingdom there shall be no end.” To all eternity therefore will he be the head of the church ; to all eternity the one source of their joy, the one object of their adoration. As the glorified saints and angels are already singing, so will they never cease to sing, “ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and glory and honour and blessing ; therefore blessing and honour, and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

In improving this subject, we shall find abundant matter of *reproof to the ungodly*, of *encouragement to the humble*, and of *direction to all*.

On the most diligent inquiry into the life and conduct of our Lord, we shall find that he omitted nothing that was necessary for the effecting of our reconciliation with God. Yet how ill is he requited by the generality of mankind ! Notwithstanding he has come down from
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heaven for our salvation, and accomplished the work which had been given him to do, the ungodly world will scarcely bestow a thought upon him. Instead of "exalting" him in their minds, and "extolling" him with their lips, and setting him "very high" in their affections, they regard him little more, than if all that is related of him were a mere fable. Every earthly vanity can fix their attention, and engage their favour; but he, whose condescension and grace have filled all heaven with wonder, can attract no notice. What base ingratitude is this on the part of man! What is it but practically to deny the Redeemer's excellency, and to frustrate, as far as in us lies, the purposes of God respecting him? It is, in fact, to say that, whatever reward God has decreed to give him for his services, he shall receive no part of it from us. And who amongst us has not been guilty of this conduct? Who has not passed months and years without any admiration of his love, any zeal for his honour? If he were as much forgotten by all, as he has been by the generality, his very name would be soon put out of remembrance. What more awful proof of our fallen nature can we have; what greater evidence of our apostasy from God? If God were our Father, we should love Christ; if we were true believers, he would be precious to our souls. And if God has said that, "*all who forget him shall be turned into hell,*" shall our forgetfulness of his dear Son involve us in no danger? Is it without reason that the apostle asks, How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? Surely if we exalt him not willingly, he shall be exalted against our will; for "*he will reign, till he has put every enemy under his feet.*" If we will not bow to the sceptre of his grace, we shall be broken in pieces with the rod of his indignation.

They who are humbly endeavouring to serve God, may, on the other hand, derive from this subject much comfort and encouragement. As Christ was, so are all his followers, servants of the most high God. Like him too, in spite of men and devils, they prosper in their work. And is there no reward prepared for them? Shall they not, like him, be exalted to thrones of glory? Shall they not be extolled by men, as the excellent of the earth; and by God, as good and faithful servants? Shall

Shall they not be very high, even heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ? Yes; God is not ashamed to be called their God: and, as soon as they have overcome, they shall be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, and inherit the glory prepared for them. Let the believer then look forward to the recompense of reward. Let him rest assured that the felicity which awaits him will abundantly compensate his labours and sufferings in the pursuit of it: let him be faithful unto death, and God will give him a crown of life. In the meantime, however, they who expect the wages, must be careful to execute the work assigned them. They must "deal prudently," that they may prosper, and "prosper," that they may obtain the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give them. But it is not in their own strength that they are to proceed, but in the strength of their exalted Saviour; of him, who, having endured the same trials, can sympathize with them; and, having all power in heaven and in earth committed to him, can succour them. To him then let every eye be directed; to him in whom all fulness is deposited, and our life itself is hid: and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.

Lastly, While the words before us prophetically declare what Christ shall receive as the reward of his labours, they serve as a direction to every one that names the name of Christ: they virtually enjoin us to pay him the tribute which is so justly due. "What shall I render unto the Lord," was the reflection that inspired the breast of David on a review of the mercies which he had experienced. And can we call to mind what our blessed Lord has done, and is yet doing, for our salvation, and not feel the liveliest emotions of gratitude in our hearts? Are we not constrained to break forth in the language of the Psalmist, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name? Yes; let us abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, and sing of his praise without ceasing. It is the most reasonable, and surely the most delightful, of all duties to exalt his name, and magnify it with thanksgiving. Let

this then be the disposition of our minds, and the practice of our lives. Let us say, "Awake up, my glory, awake, lute and harp, I myself will awake right early:" "I will sing of his righteousness all the day long;" "I will praise his name while I have my being." Then, at whatever period we shall be summoned into his immediate presence, we shall change our place, but not our employment; for the song, which we began on earth, shall be continued by us to all eternity, To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God, and the Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

CLXXXIII. THE DEPTH OF OUR SAVIOUR'S HUMILIATION.

Isai. lii. 14, 15. *As many were astonished at thee^a; (his visage was so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men!) So shall he sprinkle many nations.*

OF all the subjects that ever engaged the attention of the human mind, there is none so important as that which the prophet is now opening: the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament are full of it: it was exhibited in the first promise that was given to man after his fall: it was continued from that period with increasing clearness in the prophecies: it was set before the eyes of men in the sacrifices that were offered: and memorials of it are yet preserved in all Christian churches in the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Our Lord himself frequently introduced it in his discourses: it was the one topic of conversation when he talked with Moses and Elias on the mount of transfiguration. The apostles in their sermons and epistles represent it as the foundation of all their hopes. Paul found it to be such an irresistible weapon, and so mighty to destroy the strong holds of sin and Satan, that he determined to know nothing among his people but Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is that
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^a Should be "*him*." Bp. Lowth.

mystery, in which are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is so extensive a field for meditation, that, though we traverse it ever so often, we need never resume the same track: and it is such a marvellous fountain of blessedness to the soul, that, if we have ever drunk of its refreshing streams, we shall find none other so pleasant to our taste; or rather, we shall never wish to taste any other. To the consideration of this subject, we are immediately led by the words before us, in which we may observe both *our Lord's unparalleled humiliation*, and *the ends for which he submitted to it*.

I. His unparalleled humiliation

In order to mark this the more distinctly, we will briefly notice *the different steps of it* from his cradle to his grave. Notwithstanding he was the Creator of the universe, he had no fitter place for his reception than a stable, no better accommodation than a manger: nor had he long made his appearance in the world before his life was sought, and he was driven a fugitive from his native country. Till the age of thirty his occupation was that of a carpenter, at which business he worked with his reputed father. And during the four last years of his life, nothing could exceed the contempt and ignominy with which he was treated. He was called a deceiver, a gluttonous man, and a winebibber: he was said to be in league with Satan himself: and the people thought they spake well and properly concerning him, when they said, He hath a devil, and is mad^b: yea, they even called him Beelzebub, the prince of the devils^c. But, most of all, when the time of his crucifixion drew nigh, then all ranks of people seemed to vie with each other in insulting him. They arrayed him in mock majesty with a purple robe, a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed or cane in his hand for a sceptre. They spit on him, they smote him, they plucked off his beard, according to that prediction, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from

^b John viii. 48.

^c Matt. x. 25.

from shame and spitting^d." Nor was this the conduct of a few only ; for he was universally execrated ; he was considered as " a worm and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people : " he was " one, whom man despised, and whom the nation *abhorred*." Having loaded him with all manner of indignities, and " plowed up his back with scourges, so as to make long furrows " in it, they nailed him to the cross, and left him to hang there, till exhausted nature should sink under the torments inflicted on him.

But, as others of mankind have been called to endure many things, let us particularly notice *wherein his sufferings were unparalleled* ; for it is certain that " his visage was marred more than any man's." And here we shall find that *both in variety and intenseness*, they infinitely surpassed all that ever were sustained by any human being. In his *civil state*, as a member of society, he was degraded so low, that even a murderer was preferred before him. In his *natural state*, as a man, he was eminently distinguished above all the human race as " a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." He suffered much in *his body*, from labours, watchings, fastings ; from the want even of a place where to lay his head ; from the wounds made in it from head to foot, by the thorns, the scourges, and the nails. We may judge of this by what is said of him in the Psalms ; " I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint : my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels : my strength is dried up like a potsherd ; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws ; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death^e." The troubles of *his soul* were yet greater still. Of these he himself frequently complained : " Now is my *soul* troubled ; my *soul* is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." To such a degree was he agitated by internal conflicts, that, before he was even apprehended by his enemies, he was in an agony, and sweat great drops of blood from every pore of his body. Moreover, as his sufferings were thus various, so did they also spring from a variety of sources, *from men, from devils, and*
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^d Isai. l. 6.

^e Ps. xxii. 14, 15.

from God himself. Men laboured to the utmost to torment him by calumnies and reproaches, by taunts and revilings, and by all the cruelties that the most inveterate malice could devise and execute. Satan assaulted him with fiery temptations in the wilderness; and all the powers of darkness conflicted with him at the close of life. His heavenly Father too hid his face from him in the hour of his greatest extremity, and “bruised him” for the iniquities of his people, and called forth the sword of vengeance to slay “the man that was his fellow^f.”

Together with this *variety* of sufferings, let us take a view also of their *intensity*. In drinking this bitter cup, he found *nothing to mitigate* his sorrows, but *every thing to aggravate* them to the uttermost. If we except the sympathy of a few women, he met with nothing but scorn and contempt from all who beheld him. Not even his beloved disciples afforded him any comfort; on the contrary, he was betrayed by one, denied by another, and forsaken by all. All orders and degrees of men were alike inveterate and devoid of mercy. Of this he himself complains by the prophet^g, “I looked for some to have pity on me, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none; they gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” When in the depth of his dereliction he cried, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” so far from pitying, they, with unexampled cruelty, played or punned, as it were, upon his words, and mocked him as idolatrously calling upon Elias, instead of upon God; and, when he complained of thirst, they gave him vinegar, to increase his anguish, instead of a draught calculated to assuage it. Nor did he receive consolation from God, any more than pity from men. On the contrary, his heavenly Father now hid his face from him, and thereby extorted from him that bitter complaint which we have just recited. The united efforts of men and devils could not shake his constancy: but the hidings of his Father’s face seemed more than he could endure; so painful was it to find an estrangement there,

^f Zech. xiii. 7.

^g Ps. lxix. 20, 21.

here, where he could alone look for comfort and support. There were many things also which concurred to aggravate his sufferings beyond measure. It is not improbable that *the perfection of his nature* rendered him more susceptible of pain than other men: but however this might be, certainly *his zeal for God* must have given a tenfold poignancy to all his anguish. Consider that immaculate Lamb tempted by Satan to distrust his Father's care, and turn the stones into bread for his support; then to presume upon his Father's care and cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple; and then to deny his Father altogether, and to worship the devil in preference to him; how horrible must such suggestions be to his holy soul! Peculiar stress is laid on this by the apostle, who says, "He suffered, being tempted:" and we are told, he was so distressed by the conflict, that an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him. The dereliction also before mentioned, must have been afflictive in proportion to the regard which he bore towards his heavenly Father. *His love for men* must also have been a source of inconceivable trouble to his mind. If "Lot vexed his righteous soul from day to day;" and David had "rivers of waters running down his eyes;" and Isaiah exclaimed, "Look away from me, I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me;" and Jeremiah cried, "My bowels, my bowels. I am pained at my very heart," on account of the ungodliness they beheld, and the consequences they foresaw, what must Jesus have felt when he saw, not only the wickedness of men's actions, but all the enmity of their hearts against God, and knew the full extent of those judgments which were soon to come upon them? How must the pride of the Pharisees, the unbelief of the Sadducees, the cruelty of the Herodians, and the stupidity of his own disciples wound his soul! *The foresight which he had of his own sufferings* must have been a still further aggravation of them. In many instances the expectation of pain is even worse than the pain itself; what then must he have endured, when, from the very beginning, he foresaw every thing that should come upon him! To complete the whole, *the accumulation of all his sorrows at once* must have added so greatly to their weight, that, if he

he had not been God as well as man, he could never have sustained the load.

See then whether "the visage of any man was ever so marred as his?" Others, if they have been tried in body, have had comfort in their soul: if they have been persecuted by man, they have received succour from God: or if their trials have been of a diversified nature, still they have found some to commiserate, and, by a tender sympathy at least, to participate their lot: but HE trod the wine-press of God's wrath alone, and drank, even to the dregs, that cup of bitterness, which the sins of the whole world had prepared for him, and which could not be removed consistently with God's honour and man's salvation. Well therefore may we put into his mouth those words of the prophet, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger^h." Well too, as the text observes, might "many be astonished at him;" for whether we consider the innocence of him on whom these sufferings were inflicted, or the greatness of him who submitted to them, or his meekness and patience in enduring them, we are equally lost in wonder and astonishment.

Upon a view of our Lord's unparalleled humiliation, we are naturally led to inquire into

II. The end for which he submitted to it

Moses, speaking of the truths which he was inspired to proclaim, says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass; because I will publish the name of the Lordⁱ." By a similar figure "the sprinkling of the nations" may be understood as relating to the publication of the gospel to the whole world. And doubtless this was, in a general view, the end for which our Saviour died. But the term "sprinkling" alludes more particularly to the sprinklings which were made under the law. These were sometimes

^h Lam. i. 12.

ⁱ Deut. xxxii. 2.

sometimes *of blood*, as when the mercy-seat was sprinkled with the blood of bulls and goats on the great day of annual expiation^k. Sometimes the sprinkling was of *water*, as when a person ceremonially unclean was purified from his defilement by water of separation^l. Sometimes the sprinkling was both of *water and blood*, as when the leper was cleansed by the blood of a bird mixed with running water^m. To all of these there is a reference in the text: and from these ceremonial observances, especially as they are more fully opened to us in the New Testament, we learn distinctly the ends of the Redeemer's sufferings.

He suffered, first, *that he might purge us from the guilt of sin by his blood*. To this the inspired writers bear witness with one consent. They declare that he was a propitiation for our sins; that we are reconciled to God by his blood, and that we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Even the saints that are in heaven are represented as singing praises to him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and as ascribing their salvation wholly to the Lamb that was slain. Behold then, ye who are bowed down under a sense of guilt; draw nigh to Calvary, and see the provision made for your salvation: God had ordained, that without shedding of blood there should be no remission; and behold, here is the blood of that spotless Lamb once offered for you on the cross. Take of this by faith, and sprinkle it on your hearts and consciences; and you shall find it effectual to cleanse from sins of deepest die. The true Christian is characterized by the apostle as having "come to the blood of sprinklingⁿ." Let us then answer to this character: so shall we be protected from the sword of the destroying angel^o, and sing for ever the song of Moses, and possess the white and spotless robes in which the redeemed are arrayed before the throne of God^p.

The other end of Christ's suffering was, *that he might cleanse us from the power and pollution of sin by his Spirit*.

^k Lev. xvi. 15.

^a Heb. xii. 24.

^l Numb. xix. 13.

^o Heb. xi. 28.

^m Lev. xiv. 6, 7.

^p Rev. vii. 14, 15.

Spirit. It had been promised by the prophet, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you⁹." And it was to procure this benefit for us, that Christ submitted to his sufferings; "He gave himself for us, says the apostle, that he might sanctify and cleanse us with the washing of water, by the word, that he might present us to himself holy and without blemish¹." Let us then draw near to him, "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." "Since he bare our sins in his own body, on purpose that we, being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness," let us not be unmindful of our duty and our privilege. Let us seek "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," and labour to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

It is of great importance to observe, that though, under the law, these two kinds of sprinkling were often separated, they are invariably united under the gospel. St. John particularly notices, that "Christ came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood²." By this we understand, that the water and blood, which flowed in one united stream from the wounded side of our Redeemer, were significant of the united blessings which we should receive from him, namely, of justification by his blood, and sanctification by his Spirit. And St. Peter expressly declares, that these ends were united in the eternal counsels of the Deity, by whom we were "elected through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ¹." What God therefore has joined together, let us never presume to separate: for, as there is no "redemption but by the blood" of Jesus, so "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

The connexion between these blessings, and the means used for the procuring of them, is frequently mentioned
in

⁹ Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

¹ 1 John v. 6.

² Eph. v. 25—27.

¹ 1 Pet. i. 2.

in the ensuing chapter, and therefore need not be insisted on in this place. Suffice it therefore at present to say, that the sprinkling of the nations is the fruit and consequence of our Lord's astonishing, unparalleled humiliation^u. Neither could he have had a right to communicate salvation, if he had not first suffered for our sins; nor can we enjoy his salvation, unless we receive it as the purchase of his blood.

To conclude—The blessings mentioned in the text were not procured for one nation only, but for “many,” even for all, to the remotest ends of the earth. And as no nation is excluded, so neither is any individual in any nation. The fountain is opened for all; and will cleanse from sin and uncleanness all who wash in it. As “Moses took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and *sprinkled all the people*^x,” so now may every sinner in the universe have his heart and conscience sprinkled through faith in God's promises. None can say, “I am too vile; the blood of Christ can never cleanse from such guilt as mine:” nor can they say, “My lusts are so inveterate, that the Spirit of Christ can never purify my polluted heart:” for, “if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sanctified, in *any* instance, to the purifying of the flesh, much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge, in *every* instance, our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

^u “*As,*” “*so.*”

^x Heb. ix. 19.

CLXXXIV. THE MEANS AND EVIDENCE OF CONVERSION.

Isai. lii. 15. *Kings shall shut their mouths at him; for that which had not been told them, shall they see; and that which they had not heard, shall they consider.*

MANY are advocates for the preaching of morality in preference to the unfolding of the mysteries of the gospel, because they think that men will be more easily influenced

by what they know and understand, than by any thing which surpasses their comprehension. But to judge thus is to be wiser than God, who has commanded his gospel to be preached to all nations, and has appointed it as the means of converting the world unto himself. The most wonderful effects have been produced by it, not only on the vulgar, who might be thought open to deception, but on persons of the most cultivated minds, and most extensive influence. From the first promulgation of it to the present moment, events have justified the prediction before us; for “kings,” on hearing of a crucified Saviour, have “shut their mouths before him,” and acknowledged him as the foundation of all their hopes.

The terms in which this prophecy is expressed will lead us to consider, The means of conversion, and, The fruit and evidence of it.

I. The means of conversion

God is not limited to the use of any means. He, who by a word brought the universe into existence, can, with a simple act of his will, produce any change in the state and condition of his creatures, or do whatsoever pleaseth him. Nevertheless he has appointed a method of converting souls to the knowledge of himself: and, though we presume not to say what changes he may effect in the minds of unenlightened heathens, yet we have no reason to expect that he will dispense with the means where he has sent the light of his gospel. The means which God has appointed for the conversion of men may be considered either as *external* or *internal*; the external is, The preaching of the gospel; the internal is, The seeing and considering of that gospel.

With respect to the *external* mean, the prophet speaks of it as “that which kings had not heard.” He has just intimated that the sufferings of the Messiah should exceed all that ever were experienced by man; but that they should avail for the expiating of our guilt, and the purifying of our souls from sin. He then adds, that the great and mighty of the earth should be made to consider these glad tidings; and that, after some opposition for a season, they should become the willing subjects of the Messiah’s kingdom.

kingdom. In this way St. Paul himself understood the words of our text; for he quotes them exactly in this sense; "So have I strived," says he, "to preach *the gospel*, not where *Christ was named*, lest I should build upon another man's foundation; but *as it is written*, to whom HE was not spoken of, they shall see, and they that have not heard, shall understand^a." And indeed, this is a very just description of the gospel; for, the productions of human wisdom were open to the view of kings; but the gospel was far out of their sight; it was "a mystery hid in the bosom of the Father from the foundation of the world."

This was the weapon which the apostles used in their warfare. They preached Christ in every place: Jesus and the resurrection were their constant theme: and so effectual did St. Paul find it for the conversion of men, that "he determined to know nothing, and to preach nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The same must be the constant tenor of our ministrations: there is no other subject that we can insist upon with equal effect. Philosophy leaves men as it finds them; it may afford some glimmering light to their minds; but it can never influence their hearts. Nothing can pull down the strong holds of sin, but that which points out a refuge for sinners.

But besides this external mean of conversion there is another no less necessary, the operation of which is altogether *internal*. Many hear the gospel, and, instead of receiving benefit from it, have only their latent enmity brought forth, and their hearts made more obdurate. To feel its full effect, we must "see and consider it." There are many things of which we may have but dark and confused views without sustaining any loss; but in our views of the gospel we should be clear. Our minds must be enlightened to see the ends and reasons of Christ's death. To know the fact, That he did suffer, will be of no more use than any other historical knowledge: we must know *why* he suffered; what necessity there was for his coming in the flesh; what need of his atonement; and what the virtue of his sacrifice. It is not necessary
indeed

^a Rom. xv. 20, 21.

indeed that we should be able to descant upon these subjects for the instruction of others ; but we must have such a knowledge of them as leads us to renounce every false ground of hope, and to rely on Christ alone for the salvation of our souls. We must so discern their excellence, as to be induced to “consider” them ; to consider the death of Christ as the only sacrifice for sin ; and to consider an interest in it as the only means of salvation.

Thus, in order to our being effectually converted to God, Christ must become our meditation and delight. The height and depth, and length and breadth of his unsearchable love must occupy our minds, and inflame our hearts with love to him. Nor is it in our first conversion only, but in every subsequent period of our lives, that we must thus have respect to his death. In all our approaches to God we must come, pleading the merits of the Redeemer’s blood, and trusting only in his all-sufficient atonement. It is this alone that will preserve our souls in peace, or enable us to manifest to others

II. The fruit and evidence of conversion

The hearts of men are the same in all ages ; and the effects produced on them by the gospel are the same : the very first fruit and evidence of our conversion by it is, that our “mouths are shut *at, or before* the Lord Jesus.” First, *with respect to the vindicating of ourselves*. Natural men, according to the external advantages they have enjoyed, will acknowledge more or less the depravity of their hearts. But, whatever difference there may be in their outward confessions, there is very little in their inward convictions. All entertain a favourable opinion of themselves : they cannot unfeignedly, and with the full consent of their minds, acknowledge their desert of God’s wrath : they have some hidden reserves : they secretly think that God would be unjust if he were to condemn them : they cannot persuade themselves that their iniquities merit so severe a doom. They pretend to hope in God’s mercy ; but their hope does not really arise from an enlarged view of his mercy, so much as from contracted views of their own sinfulness. But, in conversion, these “high imaginations are cast down.” The soul, enlightened

enlightened to behold its own deformity, dares no longer rest on such a sandy foundation. Others may go presumptuously into God's presence, "thanking him that they are not as other men;" but the true convert "stands afar off," and, with an unfeigned sense of his own unworthiness, "smites on his breast, and cries for mercy." Instead of preferring himself before others, he now "prefers others before himself," and accounts himself "the very chief of sinners." Nor, however eminent his attainments afterwards may be, will he ever exalt himself. Paul indeed, when compelled to assert the dignity of his apostolic office, did declare that he was "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles:" but, to shew how far such declarations were from being either agreeable to himself, or voluntary, he repeatedly called himself "a fool in boasting," and said, that, after all, "he was nothing." Thus any other Christian may be necessitated on some occasion to vindicate his own character; but, so far from priding himself in it, he will lothe himself in dust and ashes, crying with the convicted leper, "Unclean, unclean:" the habitual frame of his mind will be like that of Job, "Behold, I am vile."

Further, the mouth of every true convert will be shut *with respect to the raising of objections against the gospel.* The doctrine of the cross is foolishness in the eyes of the natural man. To renounce all dependence on our works, and rely wholly on the merits of another, is deemed absurd. The way of salvation by faith alone is thought to militate against the interests of morality, and to open a door to all manner of licentiousness. On the other hand, *the precepts* of the gospel appear too strict; and the holiness and self-denial required by it are judged impracticable, and subversive both of the comforts and duties of social life. But real conversion silences these objections. When the gospel is "seen and considered" in its true light, Christ is no longer made "a butt of contradiction^b:" the glory of God as shining in his face is both seen and admired; and the union of the divine perfections as exhibited in the mystery of redemption is deemed

^b Luke ii. 34.

deemed the very masterpiece of divine wisdom. The believer finds no disposition to open his mouth *against* these things, but rather to open it in devoutest praises and thanksgivings. As for the way of salvation by faith alone, how suitable, how delightful does it appear! He is convinced that, if salvation were less free or less complete than the gospel represents it, he must for ever perish. He sees that it is exactly such a salvation as was most fit for God to give, and for man to receive; for that, if it were not altogether of grace, man would have whereof to boast before God; and that, if one sinless work were required of him, he must for ever sit down in utter despair. Nor does he now think the precepts of the gospel too strict: there is not so much as one of them that he would dispense with; not one which he would have relaxed. He would account it an evil, rather than a benefit, to be released from his obligation to obey them. He never now complains, "How strict are the commandments!" but rather, "How vile am I, that I cannot yield to them a more cordial and unreserved obedience!" And so far is he from condemning those who are most holy and heavenly in their deportment, he wishes that he were like them; and strives to follow them as they follow Christ.

Such are the fruits that are found on all true converts without exception; even "Kings shut their mouths." They indeed, from their high station, are less under the controul of human laws, and are ready on that account to suppose themselves less amenable also to the laws of God: but, when the gospel comes with power to their souls, they no longer ask, "Who is Lord over us?" but prostrate themselves before the Saviour with unreserved submission both to his providence and grace.

Let us learn then from hence, *The evil and danger of prejudice.*

It is difficult to conceive what destruction this evil principle brings upon the world. Thousands of persons in every place take up exceptions against Christ and his gospel without ever examining for themselves: they even shut their ears against every thing which may be said in vindication of the truth; and thus harden themselves
in

in their iniquities, till they perish without a remedy. Whence is it that so many have their mouths opened against the followers of Christ, stigmatizing every godly person as an enthusiast or deceiver? Have they searched into, and acquainted themselves with the real effects of the gospel? And have they been careful to distinguish between the tendency of the gospel itself, and the faults of those who embrace it? No: they have never considered, never seen, perhaps scarcely ever so much as heard, the gospel: they have listened to some vague reports; they have gladly entertained every story which could in any wise confirm their aversion to the truth; and then they think they cannot exclaim too bitterly against it. But let us guard against indulging such an unreasonable disposition: let us hear and examine candidly for ourselves: let us consider whether the gospel be not suited to our own particular case: and let us beg of God to open our eyes, and to "give us a right judgment in all things." If we use not these means of conversion, we shall be utterly inexcusable before God: but if we use them in dependence upon God, we shall surely be brought at last to the knowledge of the truth, and to the enjoyment of those blessings which it is designed to convey.

Let us further *learn* from this subject *the excellency of the gospel.*

If we compare the effects of the gospel with those wrought by philosophy, we shall see that the latter never was able to produce any general reformation, while the former, in the space of a few years, triumphed over all the lusts and prejudices of mankind. And, at this hour, the gospel has the same power, wherever it is faithfully preached, and cordially received: there is no lust, however inveterate, which it will not subdue; no enmity, however rooted, which it will not slay; no pride, however stubborn, which it will not humble. The more it is examined, the more it prevails: it needs only to be "seen and considered;" and it will soon remove every objection, and commend itself with irresistible evidence to the soul. Let us then consider, and reflect upon this glorious subject: let us meditate on it, till our hearts are
inflamed

inflamed with love towards our adorable Redeemer: and let our mouths be never opened more, but in thanksgiving to God and to the Lamb.

CLXXXV. MEN'S NEGLECT OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. liii. 1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

WHEREVER we turn our eyes, we find much occasion for sorrow and lamentation. The miseries which sin has brought into the world, and which are daily multiplied by the follies and wickedness of man, have rendered this state a vale of tears, not only to those who most feel their weight, but to those, who, exempt from their pressure, are yet disposed to sympathize with their afflicted brethren. But there is one subject in particular, that affords matter for the deepest regret to every benevolent mind; it is, the unconcern, which men in general manifest for their eternal interests. This caused "rivers of tears to flow down the eyes" of David, and "great horror to take hold upon him." It was on account of this, that Jesus, unmindful of the acclamations of surrounding multitudes, stopped to weep over the murderous Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah laboured much to counteract this awful infatuation: but, except to a very few, who "were as signs and wonders" in the land, his efforts were unavailing; and he was constrained to take up this lamentation over them, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

For the fuller understanding of these words we shall enquire, What is the report here referred to? In what way it obtains credit? and what reception it meets with in the world?

I. What is the report here referred to?

When our Lord expounded the scriptures to the two disciples in their way to Emmaus, he shewed them, that, according to the prophecies, "Christ ought to have

suffered, and by sufferings to enter into his glory^a." Indeed, that was the general testimony of all the prophets^b; and more especially is it opened to us in the chapter now under our consideration.

A more wonderful report never reached the ears of man. God was manifest in the flesh. The Son of God, "Jehovah's Fellow^c," not only assumed our nature, but, in our nature, died; "he became obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross." To this he submitted for our sake, and in our stead; to expiate our guilt, and, by the sacrifice of himself, to reconcile us unto God. Well might the apostle say, "Great is the mystery of godliness;" for indeed it almost exceeds the bounds of credibility.

But, strange as this report may seem, there never was any other so well authenticated, or established by such a variety of evidence. A series of prophecies respecting it, respecting not only the general outlines, but even the minutest, and most contingent circumstances of it, have been given to the church during the space of four thousand years. Every one of these has been fulfilled; and *that* too by the very persons who laboured to the utmost to destroy the credit of the report itself. The typical representations of it also were so numerous that no human foresight could have contrived them, nor could any human power have caused a combination of such various, and, to all appearance, contradictory circumstances in one event. Without noticing therefore the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, we may well affirm that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation."

With respect to its importance, never was there any other report so universally interesting as this: for it is not confined to a single state or kingdom, but to all the kingdoms of the earth, and to every individual from Adam to the latest of his posterity. Nor does any thing less than their eternal salvation depend upon it: they, who welcome it, will find acceptance with God; and they, who reject it, will be "punished with everlasting destruction from his presence^d." It is, in short, that
gospel,

^a Luke xxiv. 26, 27.

^c Zech. xii. 7.

^b 1 Pet. i. 11.

^d 2 Thess. i. 8.

gospel, which "he that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned".

And what tidings were ever so replete with joy? The most signal deliverances, the most complete victories, the most glorious acquisitions, enhanced by every thing that can be supposed to exhilarate the mind, are no more in comparison of this, than a twinkling star to the meridian sun. Even the angelic hosts, when they came to announce the wonderful event, proclaimed it as "glad tidings of great joy to all people." None ever believed the news, but he was instantly liberated from all his fears and sorrows, and filled with "joy unspeakable and glorified".

Such then is the report referred to in the text: a report so *marvellous*, that it fills heaven and earth with wonder; so *true*, that we may as well doubt our own existence as entertain a doubt respecting it; so *interesting*, that all the concerns of time and sense are, in comparison of it, but as the dust of the balance; and so *joyous*, that it is a certain and inexhaustible source of happiness to all who receive it.

But as it seems to surpass all belief, we shall do well to enquire

II. In what way it obtains credit?

It is proper to observe that the credit, which is to be given to this, is very different from the speculative assent, which we give to other reports. A belief in the gospel comprehends in it, not only an acknowledgment that it is true, but a full persuasion that it is necessary, suitable, and excellent; and such a persuasion, as compels us to renounce every other ground of dependence, and to rest all our hopes of salvation on this alone. Such a belief as this is not the result of reasonings about the evidences of Christianity, but the effect of a divine operation on the soul of man; it is produced by an exertion of omnipotence; an exertion not less wonderful, than that which was put forth in raising Christ from the dead, and setting him at the right hand of God, far above all the principalities

• Mark xvi. 16.

† 1 Pet. i. 8.

palities and powers of earth and heaven^g. If faith had been *merely* an assent founded on evidence, and *necessarily* arising from conviction, one can scarcely conceive, how the people, to whom our Lord preached, should have so generally rejected his testimony; seeing that, according to their own confession, “he spake as never man spake,” and confirmed his word with the most stupendous miracles. But his opposers, though convinced and confounded, were as full of enmity against the truth as ever, because they wanted that divine unction, which was necessary to enlighten their minds and convert their souls: for want of a spiritual discernment they could not believe in Christ, or rightly apprehend the things of the Spirit^h. It was thus for several years with the apostles themselves: they had been taught by the ministry of Christ himself; yet, till he opened their understandings to understand the scriptures, they could not reconcile the events they had seen with the declarations they had heardⁱ. Nor would Lydia have yielded to the persuasive eloquence of the apostle, if the Lord himself had not opened her heart to attend to the things delivered by him^k.

Faith then is, as we are repeatedly assured, “the gift of God^l.” And the prophet marks this truth in the words before us; the revelation of God’s arm is evidently used by him as an expression equivalent to the believing of the report of the gospel; the latter being only the fruit and effect of the former.

Nor is faith to be derived from God solely at the first: we are as much dependent on him for its continuance and increase, as for its first formation in the soul. If he for one moment leave us to ourselves, however confident we may have been in times past, we shall soon cry out in unbelief, Lord, save us, we perish^m: and every renewed difficulty will only prove to us our constant need of that petition, “Lord, increase our faithⁿ.” As we cannot embrace the truth, till “God make us willing in the day of his power,” so neither can we hold fast our profession, unless

^g Eph. i. 19—22.

ⁱ Luke xxiv. 45, 46.

^l Eph. ii. 8. Phil. i. 29.

ⁿ Luke xvii. 5.

^h John vi. 44. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^k Acts xvi. 14.

^m Matt. viii. 25. and xiv. 28—30.

unless he, who was "the author of our faith, be also the finisher^o."

That there are but few who thus believe the gospel will appear, if we consider

III. What reception it meets with in the world?

We might naturally have expected that so glorious a testimony should have been universally received with joy and gratitude: but the very reverse of this has been the effect of its publication in every age, and in every place. What the prophet Isaiah experienced in his day, all succeeding ministers have complained of. Our Lord, who wrought such unnumbered miracles in confirmation of his word, quoted the very passage before us in reference to himself, declaring that it was accomplished in the people of that generation^p. The apostle Paul also, the most honoured of all the apostles in that great work of converting souls to God, after he had planted many churches, yet found occasion to adopt the same expression^q, because those who received his message were scarcely to be discerned amidst the myriads who rejected it. And is there not as much reason now to make the same complaint? If indeed all who repeat the creed, and who *say*, I believe in Jesus Christ, were true believers, we should have reason to rejoice: but if faith in this divine record be a resting upon it as true, as suitable, as necessary, and as excellent, then are there few indeed who believe. Let us only ask, Who hath believed our report? Are there many to whom Jehovah's arm has been revealed? many, who, through the mighty working of his power, have been made to feel an interest in these tidings in some measure suited to their importance? On the contrary, do not the generality consider them as idle tales? And when they are enforced with earnestness, are not many ready to exclaim, like Ezekiel's hearers, "Ah, Lord God, doth he not speak parables^r?" Let us but cast our eyes around, and we shall have abundant proof of this melancholy fact: the contempt poured both on those who publish and those who

^o Heb. xii. 2.

^q Rom. x. 16.

^p John xii. ~~46~~ 38.

^r Ezek. xx. 49.

who profess the gospel, is a certain indication, that the report of it is but little credited, and its influence but little felt. And, if any further proof were necessary, the total absence of all the fruits of faith would demonstrate the want of that vital principle in our hearts.

Let this subject then lead us to *self-examination*.

It is not without reason that the apostle says, Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own-selves*. All imagine themselves believers, because they have been educated in a Christian land. But, if we have no other faith than what has been instilled into us in the course of our education, we have yet to learn what true faith is. We might profitably enquire into the fruits of faith, in order to ascertain its existence in our souls: but the text leads us rather to enquire, How did we obtain our faith? Was it wrought in us by the mighty power of God? Was his arm stretched forth to slay our pride, our self-righteousness, our unbelief; and to form this divine principle within us? Let us carefully distinguish between a living and a dead faith; between a speculative and a saving faith; between the faith of God's elect, and the faith of devils†. The question will be of infinite importance in the day of judgment, Who among you believed our report? let it then appear to us of importance now; and, while the gospel yet sounds in our ears let us cry, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief".

If we have indeed believed, let us abound in *thankfulness* to God.

The gift of faith, next to the gift of God's dear Son, is the greatest that God himself can bestow; because, with that, every other blessing flows down into the soul. Has God made bare his arm, and shewn the exceeding greatness of his power in enabling us to believe? there is nothing else which we may not expect him to accomplish for us. Why is it said that "all things are possible to him that believeth?" The believer is, *in himself*, as weak as other men: but he has Omnipotence engaged for his support: and whatever Omnipotence can effect, that shall be effected for him, provided he earnestly desire it,

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

† Jam. ii. 19, 20.

‡ Mark ix. 24.

it, and it be conducive to his best interests. While therefore we aspire after the highest degrees of faith, let us be thankful for the lowest. If we have ever so little faith, if it be only "as a grain of mustard seed," yet, provided it be genuine and of divine origin, "it shall remove mountains^x:" all our guilt shall be cancelled; all our lusts shall be subdued; all our graces shall be perfected; and, in due time, faith shall be turned into sight, and hope into enjoyment.

^x Matt. xvii. 20.

CLXXXVI. THE CHARACTERS AND TREATMENT OF THE MESSIAH.

Isai. liii. 2, 3. *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness: and, when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

WE find in almost every branch of science, that truth can be discovered only by deep and serious investigation. If we rest in superficial enquiries, we shall be led into numberless and fatal mistakes. In what relates to religion more especially, an impartial examination is necessary, because the doctrines of revelation are confessedly repugnant both to the prejudices and passions of mankind. Yet, strange as it may appear, there is no other science, wherein men form their opinions on such slender information, as in that. The generality adopt the notions that are current in their day, without ever considering whether they be right or wrong: the natural consequence of which is, that, in many instances, they embrace error in preference to truth. This was too much the habit of the Jews in reference to their Messiah. Our Lord had cautioned them not to judge according to appearance, but to judge righteous judgment; nevertheless they paid

more attention to received opinions, than to the oracles of God. Had they searched the scriptures, they might have found that their expected Messiah was to suffer as well as to triumph: but they, thinking only of a temporal deliverer, despised the low condition of Jesus, and made his humiliation a ground of rejecting him. That such would be their conduct, the prophet had foretold in the words before us; wherein he assigns the low estate of Jesus as the very ground, on which the united testimony of prophets and apostles should be discredited.

In the words themselves he sets forth,

First, Some marks and characters of the Messiah, and, secondly, The treatment he should meet with in the world.

I. The marks and characters given of the Messiah were not only exceeding various, but apparently inconsistent with each other; and they were multiplied in the prophetic writings, in order that, when the Messiah should appear, there should be no room to question his divine mission; since the marks themselves could not have been combined by chance, nor would have been invented by any one, who had desired to impose upon the world.

Confining ourselves to those specified in the text, we observe, that he was to be *obscure in his origin*. This is intimated under the figure of “a root out of a dry ground.” The house of David had once flourished as the cedars of Lebanon; (he himself having been one of the most powerful monarchs upon earth) but now his family was reduced; insomuch that it was like “a root” or mere stump of a tree. Its situation too, like a root “in a dry ground,” was such, as not to afford any prospect that it should ever revive again. Our Lord, like a weak and tender sucker, sprang from this root, and was, to all outward appearance, unworthy of notice. Notwithstanding the prodigies that attended his birth, and the regard paid to them for a little while, “he grew up before him,” that is, before the Jewish people, in obscurity, working at the trade of his reputed father as a carpenter. This circumstance proved an offence, and a stumbling-block to the carnal Jews: when they heard his discourses, and saw the wonders that he wrought, they said, “Whence hath this man these things? and what

what wisdom is this which is given to him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter? And they were offended at him." But, if they had duly considered their own prophecies, they would have seen, that his parentage and education were precisely such as had been foretold, and consequently were arguments in favour of his high pretensions.

Another mark exhibited in the text is, that he was to be *mean in his appearance*. The Jews expected a Messiah who should come with pomp, and whose magnificence should equal, if not surpass, that of any potentate on earth: and if Jesus had appeared in this manner, he would soon have been caressed and followed by the whole nation. But he neither possessed himself, nor promised to his followers, any of those things which are so captivating to a carnal heart. Instead of abounding in wealth, and having the great and nobles of the earth as his attendants, he was followed only by a few poor fishermen, and sometimes wanted the common necessities of life, and even a place where to lay his head. Instead of affecting honour, he declined it, and withdrew himself, when they would have invested him with royal authority. Nor did he give his disciples reason to expect any thing in this world but reproaches, persecutions, imprisonments, and death. Thus was he destitute of all external recommendations; "there was no form nor comeliness in him, nor any beauty for which he was to be desired." Now the Jews did not know how to reconcile his claims to Messiahship with his low condition: they could not divest themselves of their prejudices: they expected a temporal Messiah, and consequently concluded, that the meanness of his appearance was a very sufficient reason for considering him as an impostor. They therefore contributed to make him still more contemptible in the eyes of men, and thus, by reducing him to the lowest state of infamy, unwittingly fulfilled the counsels of God concerning him.

A third mark and character of the Messiah was, that he should be *afflicted in his person*; he was to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." To none were these words ever so applicable as to Jesus Christ. His whole life was a continued scene of labours, trials, temptations,

temptations, sorrows. We read only once in the whole scriptures, that he rejoiced in spirit ; but frequently that he sighed, and groaned, and wept. The four last years of his life were almost wholly spent in sorrow. Not to mention his bodily labours and fatigues, or his watchings and fastings (though inasmuch as they exceeded all that ever were voluntarily endured by man, they might well be taken into the account) his other trials were greater than we can conceive. “ *The contradiction of sinners against himself* ” must have been inexpressibly painful to his benevolent mind. He had come down from heaven to give his own life a ransom for them ; and was continually endeavouring to lead them to the knowledge of himself, that they might obtain salvation through him : he was working a series of the most stupendous miracles in confirmation of his word : he was labouring day and night for their sakes, making it his very meat and drink to accomplish the grand ends and purposes of his mission : yet, how were his labours requited ? they cavilled at his words, ascribed his miracles to satanic influence, and rejected the counsel of God against themselves. How grievous must this have been to him, whose whole soul was bent on their salvation ! This caused him frequently to groan in spirit, and even to weep in the midst of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But there were yet other sources of grief, more afflictive, if possible, than this. Whence arose *his agony in the garden*, when his body was bathed in a bloody sweat ? Whence those “ strong cryings and tears,” with which he supplicated the removal of the bitter cup ? Whence the heart-rending cry, which he uttered on the cross under *the hidings of his Father’s face* ? Surely the vials of his Father’s wrath were poured out upon him ; the debt which he had incurred, was exacted of him as our surety ; the penalty due to sin was inflicted on his righteous soul ; “ the arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in him, and made his heart within him like melting wax.” There was yet another thing which must of necessity greatly aggravate his sorrows ; namely, his perfect *foresight of all that should come upon him*. In mercy to *us* futurity is hid from our eyes ; so that, however great our calamities be, we are comforted with a hope, that our state will soon be ameliorated. He,

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on the contrary, saw the crisis gradually approaching, and knew the full extent of those miseries, which he was about to endure. What but the most unbounded love could carry him forward under such a load as this ?

To the eye of sense indeed, this unparalleled "acquaintance with grief" would appear strange and unaccountable : but to the view of faith, it marked him as the chosen of God, the Redeemer of the world.

This subject will be yet more fully illustrated by considering

II. The reception he met with.

One would scarcely suppose it possible, that such a person as our Lord should sojourn upon earth, and not be universally respected. His exemplary piety, his diffusive benevolence, his instructive discourses, and his blameless conduct, one would think, must conciliate the esteem of all ; and that gratitude at least must bind to him many thousands, whose maladies he had healed, or whose friends he had relieved. But, to the shame of human nature be it spoken, all, whom he had benefited, seemed to have forgotten their obligations, and to vie with each other in rendering evil for good : so far from honouring him, they despised and rejected him, and even "hid their faces from him," as not deigning to acknowledge him. There was no name so opprobrious, but they thought him deserving of it : they called him a glutton and a wine-bibber, a deceiver and dæmoniac. Before the high-priest they accused him of blasphemy ; and before the Roman governor they charged him with treason ; that so they might secure his condemnation, and have license to treat him as an enemy both of God and man. The indignities offered him in the last hours of his life were altogether unparalleled : it was indeed the hour of satan's reign, and all the powers of darkness seemed to be let loose upon him. It appeared as if nothing could satiate their malice : not content to wait the issue of a legal process, they loaded him with all manner of insults and reproaches : they dragged him from one tribunal to another ; they plowed up his back with scourges, and compelled his judge to pass sentence upon him contrary to the convictions of his own conscience : they forced him, faint and macerated as he was, to bear his cross, till he even sunk under the weight ; and, to
complete

complete the whole, they crucified him between two thieves; and continued their impious derision till the very instant of his dissolution. Nay, they were not even then satisfied; even after he was dead, they could not refrain from shewing their hatred of him: one of the soldiers, expressing doubtless the feelings of others as well as his own, officiously thrust his spear into his side: and all the chief priests and Pharisees made application to Pilate, that he would set a guard to watch *that deceiver*, as they called him, lest his disciples should come by night and steal him away, and report that he had risen from the dead. *Thus* did the whole nation “despise and reject him.” Every other part of the creation gave testimony to him: the wild beasts in the wilderness stood in awe of him; the fishes of the sea confessed his power; the winds and the waves obeyed his voice; the holy angels ministered unto him; the very devils acknowledged his divine mission: but *men*, the men too of his own nation, the very men whom he came to redeem, rejected him; “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Happy would it have been if their contempt of Christ had terminated here: but, alas! it continued unextinguished and unabated, even after he had proved his divine mission by his resurrection from the dead, and had sent down the Holy Ghost to attest his word. They could indeed no longer vent their spleen against his person, because he was far above out of their reach; but they beat his messengers, reviled his doctrines, and opposed to the uttermost the success of his gospel. No means were left untried: they used every species of persecution, that they might deter men from embracing his religion: they excommunicated, imprisoned, and murdered his followers: and, though God was pleased to convert a remnant of them, the bulk of the nation contradicted and blasphemed the gospel, till they had filled up the measure of their iniquities.

But must we confine this accusation to the people of that age and nation? Alas! where is the nation that has not poured contempt on Christ? The apostles and other disciples of our Lord went to every quarter of the known world, and preached Jesus as the Saviour of men: but in every place did the glad tidings meet with the same reception.

reception. Even where the word was most successful, the great majority rejected it with disdain. And how has it been received amongst *us*? Blessed be God! we are not left wholly without witness; but the generality despise and reject Christ, as much as ever the Jews did in the days of his flesh. He is not indeed exposed to their outrage; they cannot scourge and buffet him as once they did; but there are many other ways, wherein they no less virulently express their contempt of him. With what pertinacity do many controvert the divinity of his person, the reality of his atonement, and the efficacy of his grace! And what is this but to deny the Lord that bought them? Again, what is more common than for persons to rely upon their own repentance and reformation for acceptance with God, instead of trusting simply in his blood and righteousness? and what is this, but to rob him of his glory, and exclude him from the office, which he came to execute? Can any thing be more contemptuous than this? Again, he has given us commandments, in obeying which we are to testify our regard to him, and to honour him in the world. But who yields to his authority? Who brings his thoughts and actions into captivity to *his* will? Is not the language of the generality at least, “We will not have this man to reign over us?” To what purpose is it to say, Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which he says? it is only to act over again the part of those, who bowed the knee to him, and yet smote him on the face. Indeed, all despise him, who do not value him as they ought. If we viewed him in his real character, we should see a beauty in him for which he is to be desired; we should “behold his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father;” he would appear to us “fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely;” and the language of our hearts would be, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.” But how few are there who thus “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ!” Yet they, who do not thus regard him, have no just sense of his worth and excellence, and therefore in reality undervalue and despise him.

We cannot better *improve* this subject than by observing, First, *What enmity there is in the heart of man against God!*

The apostle of the Gentiles has told us, that “the carnal and unrenewed mind is enmity against God.” This indeed is an hard saying: but we have abundant proof of the truth of it in the subject we have been considering. We have evidence enough of it in the general forgetfulness of God, and the opposition to his will which prevails in the world. But, in the instance before us, an experiment has been made; an experiment which removes all doubt, and proves indisputably, how men would treat God, if they had him in their power. God has, for the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes, condescended to clothe himself in human flesh, and to sojourn among men. He assumed nothing of the pomp and splendour of this world, that the attachment or aversion of men might the more evidently appear to arise from their discovery of his true character. He dazzled not their eyes by a full display of his Deity, but suffered the rays of it occasionally to appear, as their organs of vision were able to bear it. He admitted them so close to him, that they might easily contemplate his proper character, and form a rational judgment of his excellencies and perfections. By this he gave them an opportunity of testifying what were the dispositions of their minds towards him. And what was the result of the experiment? Did they love him, admire him, and adore him as God? Behold, they could “see no form nor comeliness in him.” On the contrary, they hated him, despised him, and crucified him as a malefactor. Nor was this owing to the violence of a few: the whole nation rose up against him, and put him to death. Now this shews us in the clearest light, what human nature is, and what enmity there is in the heart of man against God. And oh! what an humiliating thought is it, that we should be even capable of such atrocious wickedness! If any one object, that this was done by the Jews; and that, if God were to come down amongst *us*, he would meet with a more suitable reception; we reply, That in whatever place he should appear, he would assuredly be treated in the same way: for indeed he does
come;

come; he comes to us in the preaching of his gospel: he is truly, though not visibly, amongst us; for he has said, "Lo! I am with you alway even to the end of the world:" yet, so far from admiring his beauty, and adoring his goodness, we scarcely bestow a thought upon him; yea, instead of seeking our happiness in him, and devoting ourselves wholly to his service, there is no possession so contemptible, but we prefer it before him, nor any lust so base, but we choose the indulgence of it rather than his favour.

Let this melancholy truth sink down into our hearts, and cause us to lothe ourselves in dust and ashes. Nor let us ever rest, till our enmity be slain, and our aversion to him be turned into reverence and love.

•In contrast with this, let us next observe, *What love there is in the heart of God towards man!*

Had God foreseen that his creatures would have instantly and universally adored him, we must have for ever marvelled at the love that induced him to become incarnate. But how transcendent does that love appear, when we consider that he foresaw the treatment he should meet with, and that, as he died for his very murderers, so he now invites to mercy the most contemptuous of his enemies! Let heaven and earth stand amazed! and let all flesh give thanks unto his holy name for ever and ever.

CLXXXVII. THE TRUE CAUSE OF OUR LORD'S SUFFERINGS.

Isai. liii. 4, 5. *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed.*

WHATEVER difficulty there may be in ascertaining the precise import of some passages of scripture, the fundamental doctrines of our religion are all so plainly revealed, that he who runs may read them. There is not

any truth indeed, however strongly declared, which has not been controverted by those, who exalt their own reason above the word of God. But to the humble mind, that is willing to receive instruction, and that looks to God for the teaching of his spirit, the general doctrines of Christianity, and that of the atonement in particular, are as clear as the sun at noon-day. The wisdom of some has been so perverted, that they could not see any reference to Christ in this whole chapter. But no person that is not blinded by prejudice, or intoxicated with the pride of human learning, can fail of applying the words of our text to him, "who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification." The prophet spake not as a matter of doubtful disputation, when he declared the cause of the Messiah's sufferings: but with the fullest confidence asserted, that "surely he died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." In his words we may observe

I. The apprehended cause of our Lord's sufferings

It was a commonly received opinion, that heavy afflictions were indications of God's displeasure on account of some enormous sin.

This idea prevailed much *among the Jews*: their history abounded with instances of God's immediate interposition to punish sin; from whence they inferred, that every signal judgment proceeded from the same cause. It should seem that they had adopted this uncharitable mode of judging respecting those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, or whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, as though they were sinners above all others of their own nation^a. On one occasion they openly avowed this principle, ascribing the blindness of a man who had been born blind, either to some peculiar wickedness in his parents, or to some heinous crimes, which he himself had committed in a former state of existence^b. Indeed this sentiment was the foundation of all the dispute between Job and his friends: they argued on the presumption that no good man was ever left to endure very grievous trials;

^a Luke xiii. 2, 4.

^b John ix. 2.

trials; but that the wrath of God against hypocritical or audacious sinners, would be visibly displayed in this world^c. This idea also obtained *among the heathen world*. When Paul, after his shipwreck on the island of Malta, was bitten by a viper which fastened on his hand, the inhabitants instantly exclaimed, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, vengeance suffereth not to live^d."

Now this construction was put upon the sufferings of our Lord. The people saw Jesus dying under a more accumulated weight of misery than ever had been endured by man. No one since the foundation of the world had been so universally execrated, or had met with so little compassion from his fellow creatures. They therefore concluded, that God had marked him out as an object fit to have every species and degree of cruelty exercised towards him; "they esteemed him stricken, *judicially*^e smitten of God himself." What a shocking indignity was this! That they should not merely regard him as a sinner, but as the most atrocious sinner in the universe, who deserved to have a murderer preferred before him!

But this was both foretold by the prophets, and fully obviated by the occurrences of his life.

In two different Psalms, confessedly relating to Christ, it was foretold that his enemies would conspire against him, and vindicate their conduct towards him from this consideration, that God himself had pointed him out by his judgments as deserving every thing that could be inflicted on him: "All that hate me whisper together against me, against me do they devise my hurt. *An evil disease*, say they, *cleaveth fast unto him*: and now that he lieth, let him rise up no more^f." And again, "Mine enemies speak against me, and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying, *God hath forsaken him*; persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver^g." This vile imputation on his character therefore becomes, in this view, a testimony on his behalf; since it was ordained that such indignities should be offered to the Messiah;

^c Job iv. 7—9.^d Acts xxviii. 4.^e This is the import of the words.^f Ps. xli. 7, 8.^g Ps. lxxi. 10, 11.

Messiah; and in this, as well as in a thousand other instances, the scriptures were literally accomplished in him.

But God provided a further antidote to this inpression in the occurrences of his life. Even while his enemies were conspiring to take away his life, our Lord appealed to them respecting his own innocence, "Which of you convinceth me of sin^h?" And the very judge who pronounced the sentence of death against him, was constrained no less than three times to acknowledge publicly, that he could find no fault in himⁱ.

The supposed cause of our Lord's sufferings being thus evidently founded in misapprehension and prejudice, we shall point out

II. The real cause

This is stated *in general* as originating in our wretchedness and misery.

St. Matthew, quoting the first words of the text, says, that they were accomplished when our Lord healed the multitudes of those who flocked around him^k. And this was true, inasmuch as the maladies under which men groan, are the consequences of sin; and his removing of bodily disorders was emblematical of the spiritual diseases, which also he came to heal. But the evangelist must not be understood to say, that the prophecy related to nothing more than the sympathizing with the afflicted, and the healing of their disorders; for St. Peter, quoting the very same passage, declares, that Jesus "bare, not our sorrows merely, but our *sins*, in his own body on the tree, and healed *them* by his stripes^l." Hence then we perceive that as sin had introduced all manner of temporal, spiritual, and eternal miseries into the world, it was for the removal of *them* that Jesus submitted to all the sufferings which were inflicted on him.

But *more particularly* the prophet informs us that Jesus suffered

1. For the expiating of our guilt.

It is certainly true, that, wherever suffering is endured by an intelligent creature, there guilt must have previously been

^h John viii. 46.

^k Matt. viii. 16, 17.

ⁱ Luke xxiii. 4, 14, 22.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 24.

been either contracted, or imputed. The brute animals would never have felt pain, if they had not been subjected to it on account of man's transgression^m. Now our Lord himself "knew no sin;" and yet endured infinitely more from God, from men, and from devils, than ever had been inflicted on any human being. But he had undertaken to redeem us from the curse of the broken law. He had engaged to pay the debt, which a whole world of sinners had contracted; and so to discharge it, that not one farthing should ever be exacted of those who should trust in him. Here then was the true cause of all his sufferings: is it asked, What it was that occasioned him such diversified and unutterable torments? We answer, Men and devils were the executioners; but our sins were the meritorious cause: "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." There is not a sin which we have ever committed, that was not as a sword in his bones; and it was only by his bearing of our sins in his own body on the tree, that the guilt of them, and the curse due to them, could be taken away from us. Nothing less than this sacrifice could satisfy the demands of divine justice. As for "the blood of bulls and of goats, it was not possible that they should take away sin:" nor could we remove it by any offerings we could bring: rather therefore, than we should perish for ever, Christ laid down "his own life a ransom for us."

2. For the effecting of our peace.

God was filled with indignation against his guilty creatures: nor could he, consistently with the honour of his moral government, be reconciled to his offending people, without manifesting, in some way or other, his abhorrence of their evil deeds. What then should be done? What expedient should be found for the punishing of sin, and yet saving the sinner? Behold, the Son of God himself offers to become our substitute! "On ME be their curse, O my Father: let thy sword awake against me, who am thy fellow: inflict their punishment on me, and let them go free; yea, be reconciled to them for my sake." The offer is graciously accepted; and, agreeably to the prediction

^m Rom. viii. 20.

diction before us, “the chastisement of our peace was upon him;” so that God is now reconciled to every believing penitent: he embraces the returning prodigal in his arms, and feasts him with the richest tokens of parental affection. To this agrees the testimony of the great apostleⁿ; and it is confirmed by the happy experience of multitudes in every age.

3. For the renovating of our nature.

As sin has incensed the wrath of God, so has it disordered all the powers of man. There is not a faculty either of body or soul, which is not filled with this dire contagion, and rendered incapable of exercising its proper functions to the glory of God. But the same expedient that was devised for the expiating of our guilt, and the effecting of our peace, was also the most proper for the renovating of our nature. The blood which Jesus shed upon the cross is as a balm, which heals the disorders of our souls, and restores to man the free and legitimate use of all his powers. This, no less than the foregoing, was a principal end of all his sufferings. Did he give his back to the smiters, so that they even “plowed it up with scourges, and made long their furrows?” It was that “by his stripes we might be healed:” he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works^o. And it is worthy of observation, that St. Peter, quoting the text, omits all mention of other ends, and fixes upon *this alone*; “he bare our sins in his own body on the tree, *that we being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness*; by whose stripes ye were healed^p.”

It would be unpardonable, if, on such a subject as this, we did not lead you to CONSIDER

1. What obligations we lie under to love the Lord!

If a fellow-creature should submit to excruciating torments for us, how deeply should we feel, how gratefully acknowledge, our obligations to him! We should wonder at such a proof of affection even from the dearest friend or relative. What then shall we say to these tokens of love from one, to whom, in the whole course of our lives,
we

ⁿ Col. i. 20—22.

^o Tit. ii. 14.

^p See Note ¹.

we had shewn ourselves the most determined enemies? What shall we think of Jesus, leaving the bosom of his Father *on purpose* to endure these things for us; to endure all that men or devils could inflict, and all that our sins had merited? Shall we feel no grateful emotions rising in our bosom? Shall our hearts be still frozen and obdurate? O let us contemplate the wounds and bruises, the chastisements and stripes which he bare for us. Let us follow him through the whole scene of his sufferings, and say with confidence and wonder, "*Surely*" it was all for *me*; to redeem *me* from destruction, to exalt *me* to glory. Base as human nature is, it could not long withstand the influence of such a sight: at the view of him, whom we have pierced, our unfeeling hearts would relent^a; and, constrained to admire the unsearchable heights and depths of his love, we should burst forth into acclamations and hosannas, "to him who loved us and gave himself for us."

2. How astonishing is the guilt and folly of self-righteousness!

What does the self-righteous Pharisee declare, but this? "I will not trust in the Lord Jesus: he was indeed wounded for my transgressions; but I despise the way of healing by his stripes; I can heal myself better by my own works; and I will rather wage eternal war with heaven, than owe my peace to the chastisement of another." Can any thing exceed the ingratitude which such a disposition involves in it? As for all the mockings and revilings of the Son of God, when he hung upon the cross, they were as nothing in comparison of this, because they were vented through an ignorance of his real character; whereas we acknowledge him as our Saviour, and yet rob him of his glory, and make his death of none effect. Let us then turn from such conduct with abhorrence: let us look to him, that we may be "justified by his blood," and experience the full efficacy of his atonement: so shall Jesus himself be "satisfied when he beholds this fruit of his travail," and we shall be distinguished monuments of his love and mercy to all eternity.

^a Zech. xii. 10.

CLXXXVIII. THE MEANS OF MAN'S RESTORATION
TO GOD.

Isai. liii. 6. *All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

THE lost state of man by nature, and his recovery through the blood of Christ, are the two principal doctrines of our religion. If we would ascertain the comparative importance of all other doctrines, we must judge of them by the relation which they bear to these; and consider those as most important, which serve most to illustrate and confirm these fundamental points. Moreover, these two should always be considered in their relation to each other; for it is by the atonement that we see the depth of our depravity; and by our depravity we see the necessity and excellency of the atonement. By considering them apart, we are in danger of falling into despondency or presumption: but, by uniting our views of them, our sorrows are moderated with hope, and our confidence is tempered with humility. When God tells us, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself;" he immediately adds, "but in me is thy help." Thus also the prophet, in the words before us, first sets forth *our apostasy from God*, and then declares *the means provided for our restoration to him*. These two points we propose for our present consideration:

I. Our apostasy from God.

The comparison which the prophet institutes between us and sheep straying from their fold, forms an humiliating, but just picture of our fallen state. Sheep are prone to stray, if not watched and restrained by the shepherd: and, when separated from the flock, they proceed farther and farther, without ever tracing back their steps to the fold. Now the whole race of mankind may be considered as a flock, whose duty and happiness it is to live under the care of the good shepherd. They should hear his voice, and follow his steps, and feed in his pastures, and trust in him for protection. But the whole flock is scattered over the face of the earth: all have departed
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from the fold of God, and are wandering from him, none considering, Whence am I come? or, Whither am I going? or, How shall I find my way to God again? They reflect not on the dangers to which they are every moment exposed, or on the infinitely greater happiness they might enjoy, if they would obey the shepherd's voice.

What the prophet has thus illustrated by a comparison, he afterwards, as is usual in all the prophetic writings, declares in plain and express terms.

Mankind have all turned aside from God and his ways into paths of their own choosing. One has chosen the way of open *profaneness*. To follow the bent of his own carnal inclinations, to walk at liberty in the pursuit of pleasure, to join in convivial company, to be a spectator of every vain amusement, to gratify his passions with every sensual enjoyment, *this* is the happiness which he affects, nor does he desire any other heaven than this: could he but ensure a continuance of these delights, with health and vigour to enjoy them, he would attain the very summit of his ambition. Another prefers the way of *worldliness*. He has not any great taste for what are called the pleasures of life: he desires rather the more retired comforts of a family; to provide for whom employs all his solicitude. In prosecution of his plans for their support, he engages with assiduity in his daily work: "he rises up early, and late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness;" and looks for all his recompense in beholding the increase of his fortune, and the advancement of his dependents. Every thing is made subservient to the promotion of his temporal interests; nor has he a wish or thought beyond them.

Another, scorning perhaps the sordid vices of the sensualist, and elevated, by means of easy circumstances, above the cares of the worldling, or desirous perhaps to compensate for the irregularities of his former life, chooses the less beaten track of religious *formality*. He wishes to be regarded as a person of correct manners, and of virtuous conduct. To set an example to those around him, and to be proposed as a pattern to the rising generation, is a far higher gratification to him, than to riot in dissipation, or to amass riches. With these views he is attentive to all the external duties of religion:

religion: his prayers, such as they are, are regularly performed in the church, the family, and the closet. A portion of the scriptures is read at stated seasons: his servants are instructed: his children are catechized: and his hand is stretched out to relieve the poor and needy. In short, nothing is omitted that may elevate him in the eyes of others, and serve as a foundation for self-complacency. *This* he supposes to be God's way, when, in fact, it is, as much as either the worldling's or the sensualist's, a way of his own: for, in all this, there is nothing of brokenness of heart and contrition, nothing of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing of devotedness to the glory of God: and, in proof that this is their own way, and not God's, it may be observed, that they will proceed no farther than will consist with their own humour, and reputation in the world: whereas, if they really intended to do God's will, they would do it in every thing, without any regard to consequences, or any secret reserves.

We mean not to say that there is no difference with respect to these ways; for certainly a state of formality is incomparably better than either worldliness or profaneness; but they are all evidences of our apostasy from God; and any one of them will expose us to his just and heavy displeasure.

That such is indeed the state of man, is abundantly confirmed by other passages of holy writ. St. Paul proves it by a variety of citations collected together; and infers from it, that "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." St. Peter quotes the very words of the text as applicable to every individual saint before his conversion to Christ. And we are all taught to adopt them for our own use, when we say in our Liturgy, "We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts."

Well might we have been left to wander till we had fallen a prey to the roaring lion that seeketh to devour us. But God, in compassion to our souls, has sent his only dear Son to seek us out, and to be

II. The means of our restoration to him.

We

We are apt to imagine, that, if we have not committed any gross sin, we have no reason to apprehend the divine displeasure. But we should recollect that A STATE OF APOSTASY FROM GOD IS THE ROOT AND SUMMIT OF ALL SIN. The poor senseless sheep may be pitied, but cannot be blamed, for wandering from the fold, because they are unconscious of any obligation to abide under the direction of their shepherd. But our criminality in departing from God is exceeding great. Blind as we are to spiritual truths, we yet know that there is a God, whom we ought to love and serve. We know that, to live without him in the world, or to serve him only with our lips while our hearts are far from him, is an insult to his majesty, and a violation of his commands. Yet these are the ways which we have chosen for ourselves in preference to those, which he has marked out for us in his word. What need we more to criminate us in his sight? What need we more to draw down upon ourselves his wrath and indignation? The particular acts of sin which any commit, are only so many branches proceeding from this root, and so many ways of manifesting our aversion to him. There may indeed be degrees of guilt in respect of them; but in respect to the general *habit of our minds*, we are all alike; we are wilful, deliberate, and determined apostates from God: we have cast off our allegiance to him: we have made our own will the rule, and our own honour or interest the end, of all our actions: we have lived to ourselves, and not unto him: in a word, we have, as far as depended on us, banished God from the universe, and been a God unto ourselves. *This is "the iniquity of us all."*

What might have been expected, but that God should abandon such an impious race, and give them over to everlasting destruction? yet behold, instead of leaving us to ourselves, he provided a way for our restoration to his favour. He took, not merely our particular transgressions, but the whole mass of iniquity, that had accumulated from the beginning to the end of time, and laid it on his Son. As all the iniquities of all the children of Israel were transferred to the scape-goat under the law, that he might bear them away into a land of oblivion, so were all the sins of the whole human race transferred to Christ,
that,

that, having borne the curse due to them, he might take them all away from us for ever. This was the plan, which infinite wisdom contrived for the pardoning of sin in consistency with the divine perfections. Had the Governor of the universe received his apostate creatures to favour without any atonement, it might have appeared a light matter to transgress against him; and he himself might have seemed indifferent about the rights of justice, and the honour of his government. But, by providing such a substitute, he at once discovered his abhorrence of iniquity, and shewed himself just, while he should justify those that believe in Jesus. Doubtless this was done with the consent and concurrence of his Son; for otherwise it had been an act of injustice to *him*: but it was nevertheless a fruit of the Father's love, and an expedient devised by him for the salvation of a ruined world; an expedient never sufficiently to be admired, the theme of men and angels to all eternity.

How this operates to counteract our apostasy may easily be seen. In the state of man two things were to be remedied, the guilt of his departure, and his propensity to depart: and the same remedy was found effectual for both. By the death of Jesus in our stead, our guilt is cancelled, and justice itself is satisfied on our behalf. Moreover the gift of the Holy Spirit is procured for us, that by his operations our nature may be changed, and we may be brought to delight as much in the ways of God as ever we delighted in the ways of sin. It is true, the very best of men have within them still a proneness to wander; and, if left to themselves, they would yet again depart from their good shepherd: but this is not their wish, as once it was; nor can they for a single day be absent from him without pain and sorrow, yea, without a determination instantly to return to him, and to watch more carefully against the beginnings of declension from him. St. Peter himself tells us, that, as this was the intent of our Saviour's death, so it is also its uniform effect; "he bare our sins in his own body on the tree:" do we ask for what end he bare them? it was, "that we, being dead unto sin, might live unto righteousness." The apostle then adds, "By whose stripes ye were healed." Do we enquire, wherein this healing consists? he tells us; "For

ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls^a."

In order that we may make a suitable improvement of this subject, let us, 1. *Adopt the confession of the prophet*—How justly he represents our fallen state, is but too evident both from scripture and experience. We say not that all have lived in open immoralities, or, that all have despised the ordinances of religion. God forbid. There doubtless are many, who, in their outward deportment both towards God and man, have been comparatively blameless, yea, exceeding amiable and praise-worthy. But we must recur to the former accusation, and comprehend all under the awful character of apostates from God. And is there one amongst us that will presume to deny the charge? Did the prophet include himself in the accusation, and shall we plead innocence? Did St. Paul say respecting himself and all the other apostles, that they all had been "once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures," and shall we exalt ourselves above them? Let us rather beg of God to shew us the depth of our depravity, and to humble us in the dust under a sense of our departure from him. And let us not rest in *general* confessions, saying, "*All* we have gone astray;" but let "*every one*" of us search out the particular way to which we have turned, and go to God, saying, Thus and thus have *I* done. This must of necessity precede our return to God; or rather, it is the first step of our return. But, if we be too proud to acknowledge our apostasy, if we yet remain ignorant of our guilt and danger, let us not wonder, if we be left to depart from him, till our separation become irreparable and eternal.

2. Having adopted from our hearts the confession of the prophet, let us proceed to *imitate the conduct of our God*. Behold, what the Father did, when no other way remained for our restoration to his favour: he took all our iniquities, and laid them on the head of his own Son. Thus must we also do, if we would have them removed from our own souls. We must come, not with a few of our most heinous sins, but with all, with the entire

^a 1 Pet. ii. 24, 25.

entire guilt of our apostasy from God ; and, as guilty and self-ruined creatures, without help or hope in ourselves, must lay them on the head of Jesus : we must not account any so great, as to doubt whether we may transfer them to him, or any so small, as to think we can atone for them ourselves ; we must carry all to him, that we may be “ justified by his blood, and be saved from wrath through him.” We must resemble the penitent under the law, who, while he presented his offering that was to be sacrificed in his stead, laid his hands upon its head, and confessed over it his sins. Let us only be like-minded with God in this particular, and lay our iniquities on his dear Son, and we have nothing to fear. Our past transgressions shall be forgiven ; and our present propensities shall be healed : we shall be brought home on the shoulders of our exulting shepherd, and shall lie down beside the clear streams, till called to follow him to his pastures above, where we shall be “ one fold under one shepherd ” for evermore.

CLXXXIX. OUR LORD'S BEHAVIOUR UNDER HIS SUFFERINGS.

Isai. liii. 7. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth : he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

THE preaching of Christ crucified has in every age been the great means of converting men to God : nor is there any passage of scripture, which may not, by a judicious exposition of it, be improved either for leading us to Christ, or for instructing us how to honour him in the world. But it is scarcely possible for any one to read the chapter before us, without having his thoughts led to Christ in every part of it. It is rather like an history than a prophecy, since every thing relating to him is so circumstantially described, and, instead of being enveloped in obscurity, is declared with the utmost plainness and perspicuity. The portion of it selected
for

for our present consideration was signally honoured of God to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, who, on his return from Jerusalem, was reading it in his chariot: God sent his servant Philip to unfold to him the mysteries contained in it: and Philip, having at his request seated himself in the chariot with him, "began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus^a." May the same divine energy accompany our ministrations, while we lead your attention to that adorable Saviour, and point out to you both *his sufferings*, and *his behaviour under them!*

I. Let us contemplate the sufferings of Jesus.

At the first view of this passage we should be led to expatiate upon the greatness of our Redeemer's sufferings: but there is a very important idea contained in it, which, though obscurely intimated in our translation, might with propriety be more strongly expressed: the prophet informs us that Jesus was to be afflicted in an oppressive manner, as a man is, who, having become a surety for another, is dragged to prison for his debts. This sense of the words would more clearly appear, if we were to translate them thus; "It was exacted, and he was made answerable^b."

Agreeably to this idea, instead of dwelling on the intenseness of his sufferings, we shall rather speak of them as vicarious.

We, by sin, had incurred a debt, which not all the men on earth or angels in heaven were able to discharge. In consequence of this, we must all have been consigned over to everlasting perdition, if Jesus had not engaged on our behalf to satisfy every demand of law and justice. When he saw that there was none able or willing to avert from us the miseries to which we were exposed, "his own arm brought salvation to us^c." As Paul, interposing for the restoration of Onesimus to the favour of his master whom he had robbed, said, "If he hath robbed thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will

^a Acts viii 27, 28, 32, 35.

^c Isai. lix. 16.

^b Bp. Lowth.

will repay it," so did our Lord, as it were, address his Father on our behalf; that a full compensation being made for our iniquities, we might be restored to the divine favour.

Jesus having thus become our surety, our debt "was exacted of him, and he was made answerable" for it. The demands of justice could not be relaxed. However desirous the Father himself was that man should be spared, the honour of his government absolutely required that the violations of his law should be punished. On whomsoever guilt should be found, whether on the principal or the surety, it must be marked as an object of God's utter abhorrence. Not even his only dear Son, if he should stand in the place of sinners, could be exempt from the penalty due to sin. Hence, when the time was come, in which Jesus was to fulfil the obligations he had contracted, he was required to pay the debt of all, for whom he had engaged; and to pay it to the very utmost farthing.

It was by his sufferings that he discharged this debt. Let us only call to mind the sentence originally denounced against sin, and we shall see that he endured it in all its parts. Were our bodies and our souls doomed to inconceivable misery? he sustained, both in body and soul, all that men or devils could inflict upon him. Was shame to be a consequence of transgression? Never was a human being loaded with such ignominy as he; "the very abjects mocking him incessantly, and gnashing upon him with their teeth^d." Were we to be banished from the presence of God, and to have a sense of his wrath in our souls? Behold, Jesus was "bruised by the Father" himself; and experienced such bitter agonies of soul, that the blood issued from every pore of his body; and he who had sustained in silence all that man was able to inflict, cried out by reason of the darkness of his soul, and the inexpressible torment that he suffered under the hidings of his Father's face. Were we subjected to a curse? He was, by the special providence of God, doomed to a death, which had long before
been

^d Ps. xxxv. 15, 16.

been declared accursed; and was given up into the hands of the Romans, in order that he might, in the strictest sense, “be made a curse for us.” Finally, had the decree gone forth, “The soul that sinneth it shall die?” He filled up the measure of his sufferings by death, and effected our deliverance by “giving his own life a ransom for us.” It may be said indeed, that we had deserved eternal misery; whereas that which he endured, was but for a time. This is true; nevertheless there was no defect in his payment; because his temporary sufferings were equivalent to the eternal sufferings of all the human race; equivalent, as far as related to the ends for which they were inflicted, to the honour of the divine perfections, and the equity of God’s moral government. Indeed the value of his sufferings infinitely surpassed all that ever could have been endured by man: if the whole world of sinners had been suffering for millions of ages, the demands of the law would never have been satisfied; eternity itself must have been the duration of their torments: but the dignity of Christ’s nature, as God over all, stamped an infinite worth on all that he did and suffered. Hence his death was a full, perfect, and sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world: in the hour of his death he “blotted out the hand-writing that was against us, nailing it to his cross.” Thus was our debt wholly cancelled; and “there now remains no condemnation to them that believe in him.”

Having this glorious end in view, he exhibited, throughout the whole of his sufferings, the most wonderful magnanimity in

II. His behaviour under them.

Nothing can exceed the beauty and propriety of the images, by which our Lord’s patience is here illustrated. As a sheep, when the shearer is stripping it of its clothing, makes neither noise, nor resistance; and as a lamb sports about even while driving to the slaughter, yea, and licks the very hand that is lifted up to slay it, so our blessed Lord endured all his sufferings *silently,*
willingly,

* Crucifixion was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment.

willingly, and with expressions of love to his very murderers.

Twice is *his silence* noticed in the text, because it indicated a self-government, which, under his circumstances, no created being could have exercised. The most eminent saints have opened their mouths in complaints both against God and man. Job, that distinguished pattern of patience, even cursed the day of his birth. Moses, the meekest of the sons of men, that had withstood numberless provocations, yet, at last, spake so unadvisedly with his lips, that he was excluded, on account of it, from the earthly Canaan. And even the apostle Paul, than whom no human being ever attained an higher eminence in any grace, broke forth into "revilings against God's high priest," who had ordered him to be smitten contrary to the law. But "there was no guile in the lips of Jesus;" nor did he ever once open his mouth in a sinful or unbecoming manner. On one occasion indeed he expostulates with his God and Father, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But herein he did not express the smallest degree of impatience, or of murmuring against God. As a *man*, he could not but feel, and, as a *good man*, he could not but bewail the loss of the divine presence; and in this complaint he has shewn us the intenseness of his own sufferings, and the manner in which every good man *ought* to plead with God in an hour of distress and trouble. Nor did he ever utter any vindictive threatenings against his enemies. He foretold indeed the destruction which they would bring upon themselves when they should have filled up the measure of their iniquities: but this he did with tears and sorrow of heart, not to intimidate them, but to express his affection for them. His silence before the tribunal of Pilate was not a stubborn or scornful silence, but a meek and dignified resignation of himself to the will of his blood-thirsty enemies. How easily could he have retorted all their charges upon them, and put both his judge and his accusers to shame! But his time was come; and he would not but that all the prophecies should be accomplished in him. Moreover,
when

when he was smitten unjustly before the very seat of justice, he made no other reply than this; "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but, if well, why smitest thou me?" Thus in the midst of all the cruelties and indignities that could be offered him, he never once uttered an angry, a vindictive, or an unadvised word.

Indeed there was not only a submission, but a perfect *willingness*, on his part, to bear all that he was called to suffer. When first he became our surety, and it was proposed to him to assume our nature for that purpose, he replied, "Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart^f." When Peter would have dissuaded him from subjecting himself to the miseries which were coming upon him, our Lord rebuked him with a just severity, as the very first-born of satan; since none could more effectually do the part of satan, than he, who should attempt to divert him from his purpose of suffering in the place of sinners. "With great earnestness did he desire to eat the last passover with his disciples," and "to be baptized with his bloody baptism;" yea, and "was greatly straitened till it should be accomplished." He might easily have escaped, when Judas with a band of soldiers came to apprehend him in the garden; but, notwithstanding "he knew all things that were coming upon him," he voluntarily went up to them, and asked them, whom they sought: and, after he had shewn them by one exercise of his power that he could easily have struck them all dead upon the spot, even as Elijah had done before him^g, he gave himself up into their hands, stipulating however for his disciples, as he had long since done (*in effect*) with his heavenly Father for us, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." At the time of his death also, to convince the people that his nature was not exhausted, he with an exceeding loud voice committed his spirit into his Father's hands, shewing thereby that no man took his life from him, but that he laid it down

^f Ps. xl. 6—8.^g John xviii. 6.

down of himself: and the evangelist particularly marked this by saying, "He dismissed his spirit^h."

In the midst of all his sufferings he abounded in *expressions of love* to his very murderers. When he came within sight of that infatuated, that malignant city, instead of feeling any resentment, he wept over it, and pathetically lamented the invincible obstinacy which would shortly involve it in utter ruin. Many, even thousands of its blood-thirsty inhabitants, were interested in that intercessory prayer, which he offered on the very eve of his crucifixion; the blessed effects of which were fully manifested on the day of pentecost. While he yet hanged on the cross, instead of accusing them to his Father, he prayed for them, and even pleaded their ignorance in extenuation of their guilt; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And after he had risen triumphant from the grave, he still manifested the same unbounded compassion, directing his disciples to make the offers of salvation *first* to that very people, who had treated him with such consummate crueltyⁱ; and to assure them, that the blood which they had shed, was ready to cleanse them from the guilt of shedding it.

Such was the behaviour of our blessed Lord, every way suited to his august character, and calculated to promote the great ends of his mission: for while, by his sufferings, he paid the penalty that was due from us, and thus "finished transgression, and made an end of sin," he fulfilled also the obedience which the law required, and "brought in for sinners an everlasting righteousness^k."

This subject, replete with wonder, affords us, first, *an occasion for thankfulness*.

Let us for a moment endeavour to realize our state before God. We have sinned against him: we have multiplied our transgressions: they are more in number than the stars of heaven, or the sands upon the sea shore. We owe to God a debt of ten thousand talents; and

^h Matt. xxvii. 50. Ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα.

^k Dan. ix. 24.

ⁱ Luke xxiv. 47.

and are unable to pay the least farthing towards it. What if we exert ourselves to serve God better in future? if we could live as angels in future, we could make no satisfaction for our past transgressions: the not continuing to increase a debt would not discharge the debt already incurred. But we cannot help adding to the score every day we live. What then should we do, if we had not a surety? Where should we hide ourselves from our creditor? How should we contrive to elude his search, or to withstand his power? Alas! our case would be pitiable indeed. But adored be the name of our God, who has "laid help upon One that is mighty!" Adored be that Jesus, who undertook to pay the price of our redemption, and who says, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom¹."

To view our situation aright let us consider ourselves, like Isaac, already devoted to death, and the arm of God himself uplifted to inflict the fatal stroke. When there seemed no prospect whatever of deliverance, mercy interposed to avert the impending ruin: and Jesus, like the ram caught in the thicket, offered himself in our stead^m. And shall we be insensible to all his love? Will not "the very stones cry out against us, if we should hold our peace?" O then "let them give thanks, whom the Lord hath redeemed, and delivered from the hand of the enemy."

But this subject affords us also *a pattern for our imitation*.

The delivering of us from destruction was by no means the only end of our Saviour's suffering: he further intended to "leave us an example, that we should follow his steps; that as he, when reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; so we and all his disciples, should walk according to the same rule." And how excellent is such a disposition! how incomparably more glorious does Jesus appear, when "giving his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and when he hid not his face from
shame

¹ Job xxxiii. 24.

^m Gen. xxii. 13.

shame and spitting," than any of the heroes of antiquity riding in their triumphal car, and dragging captive princes at their chariot wheels! If then we would be truly great, let our first victory be over our own spirit. Let us "possess our souls in patience," that, "patience having its perfect work, we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." "If our enemy hunger, let us feed him; if he thirst, let us give him drink; that by so doing we may heap coals of fire on his head" to melt him into love. Let us "not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with goodⁿ." Difficult, no doubt, this conduct is: but can we want an inducement to it, when we reflect how Christ has loved us, and given himself for us? Should we think it much to forgive our fellow-servant a few pence, when we have been forgiven ten thousand talents? Let us remember that all our professions of faith, if we be destitute of this love, are vain and worthless. "If we could speak with the tongues of men and angels, or had faith to remove mountains," or zeal to endure martyrdom, yet if we wanted the ornament of a meek, patient and forgiving spirit, we should be "only as sounding brass, or as tinkling cymbals." God has warned us, that, as the master seized his unforgiving servant, and cast him into "prison till he should pay the utmost farthing;" "so will HE also do unto us, if we forgive not from our hearts every one his brother their trespasses^o." Let us then set Christ before our eyes: let us learn of him to forgive, not once, or seven times, but seventy times seven; or, to use the language of the apostle, let us "be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us^p."

ⁿ Rom. xii. 20, 21.^o Matt. xviii. 35.^p Eph. iv. 32.

CXC. OUR LORD'S TRIAL AND EXECUTION.

Isai. liii. 8. *He was taken from prison and from judgment : and who shall declare his generation ? for he was cut off out of the land of the living : for the transgressions of my people was he stricken.*

IT has been generally thought, especially among heathen writers, that if virtue could be set before the eyes of men, and exhibited by some pattern of perfect excellence, it would conciliate the esteem of all, and be held in universal admiration. But Socrates entertained a very different opinion : he thought that if any person possessed of perfect virtue were to appear in the world, his conduct would form so striking a contrast to that of all around him, that he would be hated, despised, and persecuted, and at last be put to death ; because the world could not endure the tacit, but keen reproofs, which such an example must continually administer. Experience proves that the opinion of this great philosopher was founded in a just estimate of human nature. Such a light did come into the world : “ it shone in darkness ; and the darkness comprehended it not : ” the workers of iniquity hated the light, and endeavoured to extinguish it, though their malicious attempts served but to make it burn with brighter lustre. The Lord Jesus was none other than virtue itself incarnate ; and his enemies abundantly justified the opinion of Socrates ; for they combined against him, and treated him with unexampled cruelty, and slew him. The extreme injustice of their conduct towards him is strongly marked in the words before us ; which, on account of their intricacy, we shall *explain*, and, as replete with useful instruction, we shall *improve*.

I. To explain them.

Commentators have differed much in their interpretation of the former clauses of the text ; some referring them to the exaltation of Christ, and others to his humiliation. According to the former, they import that God would raise him from the dead, and give him an inexpressible weight of glory, together with an innumerable seed, who should, as it were, be born to him. But we very much

prefer the interpretation that refers them to the trial and execution of our Lord: for, in this view, they form an evident connexion between his behaviour under the indignities offered him, (ver. 7.) and his burial in the grave of a rich man, (ver. 9.) A learned prelate^a translates them thus; "He was taken off by an oppressive judgment; and his manner of life who would declare?" According to this view of the words, they particularly specify the injustice, which, under a legal form, should be exercised towards him, and the want of that, which was, in every court of justice, the privilege of prisoners, the liberty of calling witnesses to testify on his behalf. Our Lord himself refers to that custom in his answer to the high priest^b; "I spake openly to the world; and in secret have I said nothing: why askest thou me? *Ask them which heard me*, what I have said to them: behold, they know what I said." St. Paul also, when before Festus and Agrippa, complained that his adversaries withheld from him the testimony, which their knowledge of him qualified them to give: "My manner of life from my youth know all the Jews, who knew me from the beginning (*if they would testify*) that after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee^c." A further confirmation of this sense of the words arises from the manner in which they are cited by an inspired writer: St. Luke, quoting the very passage before us, says, "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away;" and "who shall declare his generation^d?" Now though the latter words are the same as in the text, yet the former vary considerably from it; and seem to determine this to be the true scope of the whole; namely, that the most common rights of justice should be denied to our Lord at the time of his trial.

The history of our Lord is but too just a comment on this prophecy: for surely there never was a person treated with such flagrant injustice as he. His enemies, unable to lay any thing to his charge, suborned false witnesses, that they might take away his life by perjury: and when these agreed not in their testimony, they laid hold

^a Bp. Lowth.^b John xviii. 20, 21.^c Acts xxvi. 4, 5.^d Acts viii. 33.

hold of an expression used by him some years before, and put a different construction upon it from what he ever intended. They dragged him from one tribunal to another in hopes of obtaining sentence against him: and when the governor, after repeated examinations, declared that he could find no fault in him, they would not suffer him to pass such a sentence as law and equity demanded, but, in a tumultuous and threatening manner, compelled him to deliver him up into their hands, and to sanction their cruelties by his official mandate. The particular injustice, which we are more immediately called to notice, was, that they never once summoned any witnesses to speak on his behalf. If they had permitted the herald, as on other occasions, to invite all who knew the prisoner to give testimony to his character, how many thousands could have disproved the accusations of his enemies, and established his reputation on the firmest basis! What multitudes could have affirmed, that, instead of usurping the prerogatives of Cæsar, he had miraculously withdrawn himself from the people, when they had sought to invest him with royal authority; and had charged them to be as conscientious in giving to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, as unto God the things that were God's! And while these invalidated the charges of treason and sedition, how many myriads could have borne witness to his transcendent goodness! How might they have said, "I was blind, and he gave me sight; I was deaf, and he unstopped my ears; I was dumb, and he loosed my tongue; I was lame, and he restored my limbs; I was sick, and he healed me; I was possessed with devils, and he delivered me from their power; I was dead, and he raised me to life again." Possibly some might have been found, who had not lost all remembrance of kindness, provided they had been suffered to speak on his behalf: but, as on a former occasion, the chief priests had excommunicated the blind man for arguing in his defence*; so now did they intimidate all, insomuch that none dared to open their lips in his favour. Even his own disciple, who had promised

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* John ix. 22, 34.

the most faithful adherence to his cause, forsook him in this extremity, and, through fear of their threatened vengeance, denied, with oaths and curses, that he even knew the man.

Having prevailed by dint of clamour, the Jews led him forth to execution, that he might be "cut off out of the land of the living." But no Jewish punishment was sufficiently cruel to satiate their malice : they therefore, notwithstanding their rooted hatred of a foreign yoke, voluntarily acknowledged their subjection to the Romans, that they might be gratified with seeing him die by the most lingering, painful, and ignominious of all deaths, a death which none but slaves were ever suffered to endure.

Who that had seen the universal and invincible determination of the Jewish people to destroy him, must not have concluded, that he was one whose unparalleled iniquities had excited their just abhorrence? who, on being told that there was not one found upon the face of the whole earth to speak a word on his behalf, must not have been persuaded that he suffered for his own transgressions? But though the testimony of man was not *formally* given at the bar of judgment, there was abundant proof, that he suffered, not for his own sins, but for ours. There was a remarkable concurrence of circumstances to establish his innocence, not only in spite of their efforts to prove him guilty, but in a great measure, arising from them. The endeavours of the chief priests to bring *false* witnesses, clearly shewed that they had no *just* ground of accusation against him. Had any person been able to impute evil to him, it is most probable that Judas would have brought it forth in vindication of his own conduct : but he, so far from justifying his own treachery, restored to the chief priests the wages of iniquity, affirming that he had betrayed innocent blood : and they, unable to contradict him, tacitly acknowledged the truth of his assertion, bidding *him* look to that as his concern. Pilate not only declared repeatedly that he could find no fault in him, but that neither was Herod able to lay any thing to his charge. He even came forth before them all, and washed his hands, in token that the guilt of condemning that *just* person should lie

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on those who had demanded his execution, and not on him who had reluctantly consented to it. The thief upon the cross reproving his contemptuous companion, attested the innocence of Jesus, saying, "We indeed suffer justly; but this man hath done nothing amiss." If he be thought an incompetent witness, because he spake not from his own knowledge; we affirm that his testimony was so much the stronger, because it was founded on common report, and therefore was not the testimony of a mere individual, but of the Jews in general. To these we may add the testimony of the Centurion, who had been stationed to superintend the execution. He had seen the dying behaviour of this persecuted man; he had seen that, immediately before his death, he had cried with a loud voice, manifesting thereby that he willingly surrendered up his soul, while his body was yet strong and vigorous: he had been witness to that supernatural darkness during the three last hours of our Saviour's life; he had felt the earthquake at the moment of his departure from the body; and by these, as well as other circumstances, he was convinced of Jesus' innocence, and exclaimed in the hearing of the people, "Truly this was a just man, this was the Son of God." Thus evident was it in the midst of all the obloquy that was cast on Jesus, that he was not stricken for any transgressions of his own.

Our iniquities were the true occasion of all the calamities that he endured. How far he may be said to have suffered for the transgressions of those who shall never be numbered amongst "God's people," is a point not easy to determine, nor at all necessary to enquire into. In some sense at least, he died for *all*, and was "a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world:" and if it be asked, who brought him from heaven? who betrayed, condemned and crucified him? we answer, *WE*: the Jews and Romans were the instruments; but "our transgressions" were the true and only cause of all his sufferings. Nor can the importance of this truth be more strongly marked than by the frequent repetition of it in this short chapter. Indeed, if this be not borne in mind, we may be affected with the recital of his history, as we should be with the history of Joseph, or
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any other pathetic story ; but we shall be for ever destitute of those benefits, which his vicarious sufferings were intended to impart.

Having explained the words before us, we shall endeavour

II. To improve them.

We may well learn from them, in the first place, to *guard against the effects of popular prejudice and clamour.*

Never was the power of prejudice so awfully manifest as on this occasion. The chief priests and rulers had only to raise an outcry against Jesus, and the unthinking populace adopted their views, and carried into effect their most inhuman purposes. It was quite sufficient to stigmatize Jesus with some opprobrious name, and all his virtues were obscured, all his benevolent actions were forgotten ; and the common forms of justice were superseded for his readier condemnation. Thus it is also at this day with respect to his gospel. We profess indeed, as Christians, to reverence the name of Christ ; but there is precisely the same hatred to his gospel in the hearts of carnal men, as there was to his person in the hearts of those who nailed him to the cross. His followers are now no less than in former ages, "a sect every where spoken against." Some name of reproach is given them ; and *that* is sufficient to put every one on his guard against them, and to render them objects of general scorn and contempt. Their sentiments are misrepresented ; opinions and practices are imputed to them without any just foundation ; nor can any innocence of conduct, any excellence of character, any exertions of benevolence secure them a candid and impartial judgment. We easily see what should have been the conduct of the Jews before they proceeded to inflict such miseries on our adorable Saviour : they should have compared his character with the prophetic writings ; and examined the evidences he adduced in support of his pretensions. Had they done this, they would never have "crucified the Lord of glory." Thus should we also do with respect to his gospel. Instead of condemning it unheard, we should give it an attentive and patient hearing. We
should

should then bring what we hear, to the touchstone of divine truth, and, by comparing it with the sacred oracles, endeavour to ascertain how far it is worthy of our belief. Such conduct would be reasonable, even if the gospel affected our happiness only in this present life : but when we consider that our everlasting salvation also depends on our acceptance of it, surely we must be inexcusable indeed if we will not bestow this attention on a concern of such infinite importance. On the other hand, if, like the Bereans, we search the scriptures daily to see whether things be as they are represented to us, we doubt not respecting the issue of such an enquiry ; we shall soon believe the gospel, and enjoy its richest blessings. Let us not then suffer our judgment to be warped by prejudice, or our enquiries to be stopped by popular clamour. If any people be objects of general odium on account of their religious sentiments and conduct, let us not hastily conclude that they are wrong ; lest peradventure we “ be found fighting against God,” and “ reject the counsel of God against ourselves.” The opposition made to them may perhaps be rather considered as a presumption in their favour ; because the true religion, and its most strenuous advocates, have in every age been maligned and opposed. The just medium is, neither to reject nor receive any thing without a diligent and impartial examination ; but “ to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good^f.”

This subject may further teach us to *expect injuries from the hands of an ungodly world.*

The scripture has plainly told us that we must suffer with Christ in order that we may reign with him. Nor did our Lord conceal this truth from his followers : on the contrary, he was peculiarly solicitous that they should bear it in mind : “ Remember, says he, the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord : if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you^g.” It is certain therefore that we must be conformed to our Saviour's image, and, like him, be made perfect through sufferings. If we think to resemble him in holiness, and yet

^f 1 Thess. v. 21.

^g John xv. 20.

yet to escape the cross, we shall find ourselves disappointed in the issue. We must either violate our conscience by sinful compliances, or bear reproach on account of our singularity. We may indeed, by a long course of exemplary conduct, put to silence the ignorance of foolish men^h: but our fortitude will be tried; nor can we hope that God will make our enemies to be at peace with us, till our ways have long been pleasing in his sight, and our fidelity have been proved by many painful and victorious conflicts. It is worthy of observation, that St. Peter makes this very improvement of our Lord's sufferings: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind*ⁱ." He goes further still; and bids us "not think it strange if we should be tried with fiery trials, as though some strange thing happened unto us; but rather to rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed we may be glad also with exceeding joy." Let us then take up our cross daily, and follow Christ. Let no fear of man deter us from a conscientious discharge of our duty. Let us "remember him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds." And if we have reason to expect, that, like him, we shall even be "cut off out of the land of the living" for our adherence to the truth, let us cheerfully "suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together."

There is yet one more improvement which, above all, it behoves us to make of this subject. It powerfully speaks to all of us, *Let that be a source of grief to you, which was an occasion of such misery to Christ.* Can we recollect that every transgression of ours inflicted a wound on the sacred body of our Lord, yea, and caused the deepest agony in his soul, and yet review our past lives with indifference? Shall not rather the experience of every day fill us with shame and contrition? And shall not sin appear so hateful in our eyes, that we shall henceforth turn away from it with indignation and abhorrence? We are informed that David, when three of his worthies had cut

^h 1 Pet. ii. 15.ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 1, 12, 13.

cut their way through the Philistine hosts, and, at the most imminent peril of their lives, had brought him water from the well of Bethlehem, forebore to drink of it, and poured it out before the Lord with this reflection ; “ Is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives ^k ? ” However much he had thirsted for it, he was deterred by this consideration from even tasting it. And shall not we, when tempted to gratify any unhallowed appetite, call to mind what it cost our Lord to redeem us from it ? However strong may be our thirst for sin, shall not the remembrance of our having so often drank it with greediness abase us in the dust ? and shall we not in future put away the cup from our lips, saying, “ This is the blood, not of a mere *man* who *jeopardied* his life, but of *God's only Son*, who *died* for me ? Was he crucified for me once, and shall I now crucify him afresh ? Did he shed his precious blood for me, and shall I tread him under foot, and count his blood an unholy thing ? How shall I do such wickedness, and sin thus against my God and Saviour ? This were indeed a good improvement of the subject before us : this were to answer the great end of all Christ's sufferings ; since “ he gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.” This too beyond all things would evince us to be the very “ people of God, for whose transgressions he was stricken.” Let this effect then be visible amongst us. So, when we ourselves shall stand at the tribunal of our Lord, our lives shall testify on our behalf ; and the judge of quick and dead shall say, “ I know that ye feared me, seeing that ye put away from you the accursed thing, which my soul hated.”

^k 2 Sam. xxiii. 15—17.

CXCI. THE FATHER'S CONDUCT TOWARDS THE
INNOCENT JESUS EXPLAINED AND VINDICATED.

Isai. liii. 9, 10. *He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.*

THE accomplishment of the prophecies is one of the strongest arguments for the truth of Christianity. The predictions which relate to the great founder of our religion are so numerous and so minute, that they could not possibly have been dictated by any but *him*, to whom all things are naked and open, and who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. The very smallest circumstances of our Lord's death, even such as were most *unlikely* and *insignificant*, were pointed out with as much accuracy as those which were most important. What could be more *unlikely*, than that he should be crucified, when crucifixion was not a Jewish but a Roman punishment? and yet that was foretold by David hundreds of years before Rome was built. What could be more unlikely than that, if he were crucified, he should not have his legs broken, when *that* was the customary way of hastening the end of those who were crucified, and they who were crucified with him were actually so treated? yet it was foretold fifteen hundred years before, that "a bone of him should not be broken." What more *insignificant*, than that the soldiers should part his garment, but cast lots for his vesture? yet *that*, with many other things equally minute, was circumstantially foretold. So, in the text, his honourable interment after his disgraceful death, is predicted: "his grave," as the words may be translated, "was appointed with the wicked; but with the rich was his tomb." Now, if we consider the treatment which Jesus was to meet with, it was necessary that such events as could not be foreseen by human wisdom, or accomplished by man's device, should be foretold; because such a concurrence of circumstances, all happening exactly according to the predictions concerning him, would fully vindicate his character, and manifest, that all which he suffered

suffered was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Notwithstanding he was innocent and spotless in himself, yet he was to be treated as the vilest of malefactors : nor was he to be persecuted and put to death by men only, but to be an object also of the divine displeasure. Therefore it was foretold by the prophet in the text, that, "*although*^a he had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth, yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief."

From these words we shall take occasion to consider, first, The innocence of Jesus ; secondly, The conduct of the Father towards him ; and thirdly, The reasons of that conduct.

I. Let us consider the innocence of Jesus.

The declaration of our Lord's innocence is here peculiarly strong : it is not merely asserted, That he did no violence, but it is taken for granted as a thing which could not admit of one moment's doubt ; "*although* he had done no violence." And indeed, well might it be taken for granted ; for, if he were not innocent himself, he could not be a propitiation for our sins : if he had in the least deviated from the perfect law of God, he himself had needed an atonement for his own sins, as much as we for ours. Under the ceremonial law, the lamb that was to be offered in sacrifice at the Passover was solemnly set apart four days before, in order that it might be examined ; and, if it had the least spot or blemish, it was not worthy to be offered. To this St. Peter refers, when he calls our Lord "a Lamb without blemish, and without spot:" and it should seem that our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem just four days before the Passover, and the strict examination of him before Pilate and the chief priests, were intended to fulfil that type. In reference to the same, St. John says, "He was manifested to take away our sin; and in him was no sin;"
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^a The word "*because*" should be translated, "*although*." See Bishop Lowth's version, which removes all the obscurities from this passage. If this subject were treated *separately*, and not in a series of Sermons on the chapter, the first and last clauses of the text should be omitted.

for if there had been any in him, he could not have removed ours.

The text sets forth his innocence in two particulars ; “ he did no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth.” Deceit and violence are the fruits of wisdom and power when abused : and alas ! wisdom is but too often employed in devising mischief, as power is in executing it. Our Lord was endued with wisdom ; for “ in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge : ” and he was possessed of power ; for all nature, animate and inanimate, was under his control : but he never abused either for the purposes of deceit or violence. On the contrary, he employed his wisdom in confounding his captious adversaries, and in explaining the mysteries of his kingdom to his followers : and his power he exerted in working miracles upon the bodies of men, and in effecting the conversion of their souls. Who can read any of his discourses without acknowledging, as they did of old, that “ he spake as never man spake ? ” who that hears him commanding the unclean spirits with authority, and rebuking the winds and the sea, must not immediately confess, that “ no man could do these things except God were with him ? ” Sometimes indeed he answered differently from what we might have expected ; as when he told the young man to “ enter into life by keeping the commandments : ” but this he did, because he knew, that the young man’s heart was proud of his great attainments, at the same time that it was glued to his earthly possessions. This therefore was the way, not to deceive, but to undeceive him, by discovering to him the sinfulness of his heart : whereas, if he had told him at once, that the way to enter into life was by believing in him, he would indeed have given a more explicit answer to the question ; but he would have left him wholly ignorant of his own corruptions, and would have exposed him thereby to the tenfold danger of making, like Judas, an hypocritical profession. So our Lord may appear to have done violence, when he beat the armed men backward to the ground by his word. But this was done in pity to their souls : it was the very way to convince them, that they were about to seize the Lord’s prophet ; and thereby to make
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make them desist from their purpose. If they were Jewish soldiers, as doubtless they were, because they were sent by the chief priests and elders, and Pilate was not yet acquainted with their intentions, they could not but have heard the history of the prophet Elijah, who struck *dead* two different companies of men, consisting of fifty each, who came to apprehend him. Now our Lord struck them to the ground to bring that to their remembrance: and when they would not desist, he resigned himself into their hands. He healed also the high priest's servant, whose ear Peter had cut off: and, as he had once before rebuked his disciples, when they would have called fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that had refused him admission, so now he told them, that "all who took the sword, should perish with the sword." Indeed, if there had been any *deceit* in Jesus, Judas would gladly have discovered it, as a justification of his own treachery; and if there had been any *violence* in him, his numerous and watchful enemies would not have failed to lay it to his charge. But, so far was he from using deceit or violence himself, that he has engaged to deliver his people from all, who, in either of these respects, should attempt to injure them: "He shall redeem their souls, says David (Ps. lxxii. 14.) from deceit and violence."

It appears then that his innocence in every respect stands unimpeached; "he was just such an high priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Nor was he more clear in the sight of men, than he was in the sight of God; for "he did always those things which pleased his Father:" and thrice did his Father, by an audible voice from heaven, declare him to be "his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased."

But, however innocent he was, however free both from violence and deceit, yet he was not dealt with as innocent either by God or man: for, as his own countrymen treated him with the utmost barbarity, so even his heavenly Father acted towards him, as if he had been the greatest of all criminals; as we shall see by considering

II. The conduct of his Father towards him.

We must acknowledge that there is something inexpressibly awful, and deeply mysterious, in the declaration before us: nevertheless it will be found literally true, that, notwithstanding the complacency and delight which the Father must of necessity have taken in the immaculate Jesus, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him."

That his heavenly Father did inflict punishment upon him, even these words indisputably prove; as also do the words which immediately follow; "he hath put him to grief." There is also in other parts of scripture abundant evidence to confirm it: for, all that either men or devils did, was not only by his permission, but by his express commission. The Father "spared not his Son, but *delivered him up*;" and though the Jews took him, and by wicked hands crucified and slew him, yet St. Peter says, he was delivered up "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." And indeed, how otherwise shall we account for his agony in the garden? If it was produced by devils, still they "could have no power against him, except it had been given them from above." And what shall we say to that bitter lamentation which he uttered upon the cross? The complaint arose, not from any pains of body, but from the desertion and wrath which his soul experienced from his heavenly Father: *then* the Father "*bruised him*." This expression alludes to the holy incense mentioned in Exod. xxx. 34, 36: "The Lord said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices with pure frankincense, and thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee; and it shall be unto you most holy." Before these spices could ascend up to God as incense, or be worthy to be laid up in the tabernacle, they were to be "beaten very small:" and in the same manner was Jesus to be bruised, before the incense of his merits could be accepted, or his own person be received into the tabernacle of the Most High. This was by far the most distressing part of our Saviour's sufferings; nor could we account for his behaviour under them, unless we believed, that they were inflicted by his heavenly Father: for many martyrs have endured all

all that men could inflict, not only with resignation, but with joy and triumph : but *here* we see no less a person than the Son of God exceeding sorrowful even unto death at the very apprehension of his sufferings : we hear him crying for the removal of the bitter cup, and bewailing in the most pathetic manner the intenseness of his agony.

Nor did the Father bruise him only, but as the text intimates, *took pleasure* in bruising him : “ *It pleased the Lord to bruise him.*” The word which is here translated, “ *It pleased,*” includes in it an idea of complacency, and is strongly expressive of pleasure : the import of it is much the same with that which the apostle uses, when he says, “ *With such sacrifices God is well pleased :*” in conformity with which idea, Jehovah is said to smell a sweet savour from those sacrifices which prefigured the crucified Jesus. Indeed, the same idea, though not so expressly asserted, is supported and confirmed by many other passages of scripture. In the very verse following the text, we are informed, that *the Father gave him promises on the express condition that he should endure his wrath* for man ; that “ *when he should make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed, and should prolong his days ;*” that is, that, on condition of his bearing the wrath due to sinners, many should be everlastingly saved through him, and with him. In another place we are told that “ *God sent his Son into the world for this very end*, that he might be the propitiation for our sins ;” that is, that he might bear the punishment due to them : St. Paul also says, that “ *Christ was made sin, that is, a sin-offering, for us :*” and again, that “ *he was made a curse for us :*” all of which passages shew that God sent him into the world on purpose to bruise him. We may further observe, that *the Father had from the beginning delighted in the sacrifices which were offered, because they were types of that sacrifice*, which Christ in due time should offer upon the cross. When Noah came out of the ark, he built an altar, and offered a burnt-offering upon it ; and then we are told, “ *The Lord smelled a sweet savour.*” So, at the very time that our Lord was bruised, the Father was pleased with it ; for the apostle says of Christ,

that he "gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour;" plainly implying, that as God was pleased with the offering of beasts by Noah, and with the savour of the incense which was composed of bruised spices, so he was pleased with the offering of his own Son, while he was yet consuming with the fire of divine wrath. *The Father has moreover exalted Jesus in consideration of his having endured the sufferings which he had appointed him.* The apostle having set forth Christ as obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, adds, "*Wherefore* God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name." In the same manner, *every blessing which the Father bestows upon mankind is given as the purchase of Christ's blood, and as the reward of his obedience unto death.* Redemption includes every blessing of the covenant; every evil we are delivered from, and every good which we are ever to possess: and this the apostle ascribes wholly to the efficacy of Christ's blood; "We have redemption, says he, through his blood;" and another apostle says, "Ye were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ."

Now did the Father give promises to his Son on the express condition of his suffering? did he send him into the world on purpose that he might suffer? did he delight in other sacrifices merely as typical of those sufferings? did he declare, that the offering up of his dear Son was an offering of a sweet smelling savour? did he exalt Christ for his sufferings? and does he continually bestow the richest blessings on his very enemies as a reward of those sufferings? did he do all these things, and shall we not acknowledge that the sufferings of Christ were pleasing to him; or, to use the words of the text, that it *pleased* the Lord to bruise him?

However, we must not imagine that the mere act of inflicting punishment on his only dear Son could be pleasing to him: No: "He delighteth in mercy;" and "Judgment is his strange work:" he is averse to punish even his enemies; and much more his own Son. But there were very sufficient reasons why he should be pleased with bruising his own Son; to illustrate which we shall consider

III. The reasons of the divine conduct.

If we expect to account for every thing, we shall soon reject the whole of revelation : God never intended that we should ; nor indeed is it possible. We know that an ignorant peasant is not able to search out the reasons upon which a profound statesman acts ; nor could he even comprehend them, if they were laid before him : and shall we wonder if there be some mysteries in the revelation and in the providence of God which we cannot explore, and which perhaps, if unfolded ever so clearly, would be far above our comprehension ? Is not God far more exalted above us, than we can be above our fellow-creatures ? We must therefore proceed with great humility and reverence, when we presume to investigate the reasons by which the all-wise God is actuated, especially in subjects so deeply mysterious as this which we are now contemplating. However, we will attempt to assign some reasons for his conduct.

He was pleased when he bruised his Son, first, because the bruising of him was *pleasing to his Son*. As the Father did not take pleasure in inflicting punishment, so neither did the Son in enduring it, *for itself* ; the punishment, considered separately from its consequences, was equally grievous to him who inflicted, and to him who bore it. But Jesus thirsted for the salvation of men ; he knew that it could not be accomplished consistently with the rights of justice and truth, unless he should become their surety : he was well aware of all that he must undergo, if he should stand in the place of sinners ; yet he cheerfully undertook it ; and “ for the joy that was set before him ” of redeeming so many millions from destruction, “ he endured the cross, and despised the shame.” When the time drew nigh, he so longed for it, that “ he was quite straitened till it could be accomplished.” And therefore, as the Father knew how pleasing it would be to his Son to have the iniquities of mankind laid upon him, he himself found pleasure in laying them upon him : it gave him pleasure to put the finishing hand to that which had been agreed upon between them, and thus to make him “ the author of eternal salvation ” to all his people.

Another reason may be this : God was pleased with bruising his own Son, because it would prove so *beneficial to man*. We are not to imagine that the Son loved us more than the Father ; for the Father expressed as much love in giving his Son, as the Son did in giving himself ; the Father testified his compassion as much in laying our iniquities on his Son, as the Son did in bearing them in his own body on the tree. The whole work of salvation is the fruit of the Father's love : he pitied us when we fell ; he in his own eternal counsels provided a Saviour for us before we did fall, yea, before we were brought into existence. He saw how inconceivably miserable we must have been to all eternity if left to ourselves : he therefore covenanted with his Son, and agreed to pardon us, to give us peace, to adopt us for his children, to restore us to our forfeited inheritance, and to exalt us to glory, if *he* would, by substituting himself in our place, remove the obstacles which prevented the exercise of his mercy towards us. When therefore these counsels were nearly executed, the Father was pleased with putting the bitter cup into the hands of his Son, because it would henceforth be taken out of the hands of all those who should believe in Christ ; none should perish but through their obstinate rejection of this Saviour ; and all, who would embrace him, would be exalted to far higher glory than they would ever have obtained, if they had never fallen.

A third reason we may assign is this ; the Father was pleased with bruising his own Son, because it would *put great honour upon the divine law*. We cannot but suppose that God must be concerned for the honour of his own law, because it is a perfect transcript of his own mind and will. Now this law had been violated and dishonoured by the transgression of man : if the sanctions of the law were not enforced, the law itself would be set aside ; or, if the sanctions were enforced, still the punishment of the offender would never repair the dishonour done to the law, and the contempt he had poured upon it. But by the sufferings of Jesus “ the law was magnified and made honourable.” The majesty of the law was manifested in having the Son of God himself subject to it : the authority of the law was established in
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that its penalties were inflicted even on the Son of God, when he stood in the place of sinners ; and therefore no sinner could hope thenceforth to transgress it with impunity : the purity of the law was declared, in that nothing less than the blood of the Son of God could expiate any transgression against it : the justice of the law was held forth, in that it did not relax one jot or tittle of its demands even in favour of the Son of God. Now when the divine law was to be so magnified by the voluntary sufferings of the Son of God, we cannot wonder that the lawgiver should be pleased ; especially as the majesty of the law was *more* fully manifested, its authority *more* firmly established, its purity *more* conspicuously declared, and its justice *more* awfully displayed by means of the sufferings of the Son of God, than it could have been by the everlasting obedience of angels, or the everlasting misery of the whole human race.

The last reason we shall assign, is this ; the Father was pleased with bruising his own Son, because *he himself was thereby transcendently glorified*. God cannot but delight in the manifestation of his own glory : nor did he ever manifest it in such bright colours, as while he was bruising his own Son. When Judas went out to betray his Master, “ Now,” said Jesus, “ the Son of man is glorified, and God is glorified in him.” In that awful hour the divine perfections, which seemed, as it were, to be at variance, were made to harmonize, and to shine with united splendor. We are at a loss what to admire most ; the inflexibility of his justice, which required such a sacrifice, or the heights of his love, which gave it ; his inviolable truth in punishing sin, or the extent of his mercy in pardoning the sinner ; the holiness of his nature in manifesting such indignation against iniquity, or his wisdom and goodness in providing such a way of deliverance from it. Every attribute of the Deity is incomparably more glorified than it could have been in any other way : mercy shines in the way of satisfying the demands of justice, and justice in the way of exercising mercy. This view of the Deity was not more new to man, than it was to the angels in heaven ; and when a ray of this glory shone forth at the incarnation of our Lord, the angels burst forth in joyful acclamations, and sang,

“Glory to God in the highest.” Since then the bruising of our Lord tended so much to the manifestation of the divine glory, no doubt the Father was well pleased with it.

We might assign more reasons, if it were necessary ; but we trust that these are sufficient for the justifying of the Father's conduct towards his Son. If, as has been shewn, the Father saw, that the bruising of his Son would be—pleasing to his Son—beneficial to man—honourable to his law—and glorious to himself—it can surely be no imputation on the Father's character to say, “It pleased him to bruise his Son.”

Amidst the many reflections which naturally arise from this subject, such as *the greatness of the Father's love* (in that “he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all”) and *the danger of unbelief* (in that, if we yield to it, the Father's wrath will infallibly fall on us, Mark xvi. 16.) and others too numerous to mention, we shall confine our attention to one ; namely, *How great must be the evil of sin !*

We have seen the immaculate Jesus bruised under the weight of his Father's wrath, and his Father pleased with bruising him—and from whence did this arise ? from the evil, the dreadful evil of sin. Sin had introduced confusion into the divine government : sin had set the divine perfections at variance : sin had dishonoured the divine law : sin brought the Son of God from heaven : sin put him to death : and, had he not died, sin would have sunk us all into the lowest abyss of misery for ever. Sin reduced God himself to the necessity of delighting either to punish us, or to bruise his own Son. What must sin be, when such are the effects arising from it ! And yet how lightly do we think of it ! how unconcerned are we about it ! But did our surety think lightly of it, when he cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?” Did the Father think lightly of it, when he was bruising his own Son ? and do they think lightly of it who are now receiving the wages of it in hell ? If nothing less than the blood of Christ could expiate it, is it a small evil ? If it crushed even him with its weight, though he had none of his own to answer for, shall we find it easy to bear, who are so laden with iniquities ? Let us but look at sin one moment as it appears in the death of Jesus ; let us
recollect

recollect that he was God equal with the Father; and that yet he almost sunk under the load; let us recollect this, I say, and we shall surely begin to tremble, lest we should lie under the weight of it for ever. We never shall see sin aright, till we view it in the tears and groans, the blood and agonies, of the Son of God: for there at once we behold both the evil, and the remedy of sin: there at once we learn to fear and hope, to weep and rejoice. If we look at sin in any other view, we may dread its consequences, but we shall never hate its malignity. But if we view it in the dying Jesus, we shall be delivered from the fear of consequences, because the guilt of it was expiated by him; and we shall begin to loath it as an hateful and accursed evil. This is the only source of ingenuous, evangelical repentance; nor till we “look on him whom we have pierced, shall we ever mourn aright for sin, or be in bitterness for it, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.” Let us then look at sin in this light, and we shall soon be like-minded with the Father; we shall be pleased with the sufferings of Jesus; they will be our hope, our plea, our joy, our boast; and we shall exultingly say with the apostle, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

CXCII. CHRIST'S DEATH A CONDITION OF OUR SALVATION.

Isai. liii. 10. *When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*

THERE are in the holy scriptures many apparent contradictions, which, when properly understood, are perfectly consistent with each other. The redemption of our souls is continually represented as the freest gift of God: yet the very term redemption implies that a price is paid. But here is no real inconsistency; because that, which to *us* is as free as the light we behold, or the air we breathe, was dearly purchased by our blessed Lord: and the apostle himself combines these ideas, saying, “we are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The truth is, that eternal life

life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ : but, before it could be thus freely given consistently with the divine perfections, it was necessary that an atonement should be made for sin : and, in order to the liberating of the debtor, the debt must be discharged by his surety. Hence, when our Lord undertook to save us, a condition was imposed upon him, and the promise of success in his undertaking was suspended on his performance of that condition. The words before us lead us to consider

I. The condition imposed.

To understand the true *nature* of this condition, it is necessary that we should advert to the offerings that were made under the law. If any person had sinned, even through ignorance, he was bound to bring an offering in order to make atonement for his sin. This offering was to be a bullock, or a male or female kid, or a lamb, according to the quality of the offender. He was to lay his hands upon the head of the offering, in token that he confessed himself to be deserving of death, and that he transferred his guilt to the creature that was to suffer in his stead. The creature was then killed ; its blood was poured out at the foot of the altar, some of it having been previously put upon the horns of the altar ; and then its fat was burnt upon the altar : and God smelling a sweet savour from it, accepted it on behalf of the offerer.

Now this will shew what Christ was to do. He had undertaken to save man : he must therefore come and put himself in the place of man ; and present himself before God to suffer all that was due to our transgressions. But whereas the animals could suffer only in body, he was to suffer both in body and soul, and to present his whole person, a sacrifice for sin. In consideration of this sacrifice every sinner in the universe was to have liberty to transfer his guilt to him, and, on so doing, to find acceptance with God through him. Thus he was to become the sinner's substitute, or as the apostle expresses it, " to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

But what necessity was there for any such condition ? Why must God's only dear Son become a man, and offer
up

up himself a sacrifice for sin? To answer this important enquiry, we observe, *first*, that man, having once transgressed the law of God, could never afterwards be justified by obedience to it. The law denounced a curse against transgressors, but made no provision for their restoration to the divine favour. It made no mention of repentance or amendment; it spake nothing of pardoning mercy; it simply required obedience, and inflicted the penalty of death on the disobedient. From that time there could not be any law given whereby we might have life; for if there could, God tells us, that verily righteousness should have been by the law. If therefore man ever was to be saved at all, there was a necessity that some other plan should be devised, whereby the law should take its course and yet the transgressor be rescued from condemnation. This could not be done unless a proper substitute for man could be found, who should at once satisfy all the demands of law and justice, and bring in a righteousness that should be transferable to man for his justification before God. Hence, *in the next place*, arose a further necessity for the death of Christ, namely, that there was none other found in the whole creation, who was capable of undertaking so great a work. As for "the blood of bulls and of goats, it was not possible that that could take away sin:" "nor could any man redeem his brother," or even himself. If an angel, or all the angels of heaven had attempted it, they must have failed: for in the very first instance they must have suffered eternal death. This was the penalty due to sin; and if it had been inflicted on them, they must have been in the state of the fallen angels to all eternity, seeing that there never would come a time, when it could be said, that the law was fully satisfied. Besides, their obedience to the law, even supposing it to have been meritorious in the sight of God (which it could not be, because, "after having done all that was commanded them, they would be only unprofitable servants,") they could merit only for themselves: the righteousness of a mere creature could never have been so excellent as to deserve eternal happiness and glory for a sinful world. We do not indeed presume to limit God, and to say what he might or might not have done, *if* he had pleased.

But

But according to the light given us in the scripture we are warranted to say, that, if any lesser sacrifice would have answered all the purposes of his glory and of man's salvation, he never would have sent "the man that was his fellow." He would not have given his Son out of his bosom to die for us, if the death of a mere creature would have sufficed. This leads us to notice a *further* ground of Christ's sacrifice, which was, that in it there was a sufficiency for the salvation of the whole world. Christ being God as well as man, there was an infinite value in his sufferings; his sufferings for a time were equivalent to the sufferings of the whole world to all eternity. There was also an infinite value in his obedience; so that it could merit, not for himself only, but for others, yea, for all the myriads of sinners who should trust in it. The penalty of the law being inflicted on him, divine Justice was satisfied; and scope was opened for the exercise of mercy. The sinner's debt being paid, the sinner could be discharged in perfect consistency with God's truth and holiness.

Hence then it was that "help was laid upon One so mighty;" and that such a condition was imposed upon him.

As to what is said of the Father making his soul an offering, the words may be translated either in the second or the third person: if in the second, they relate to the Father's laying of our iniquities upon his Son; if in the third, (which we rather prefer) they relate to Christ's voluntarily making himself an offering.

The nature and grounds of this condition being thus explained, it remains only, for the further illustration of this point, that we state, in few words, what is implied in the condition itself. It implies, that *there is no salvation but by the blood of Christ*. It has before been observed that such a condition would never have been imposed, if man could have been saved by any other means: and this is confirmed by that express declaration of the apostle, "There is no other name given under heaven, whereby we can be saved, but by the name of Jesus Christ." It implies further, that *every sinner must actually present, as it were, to God the blood of Christ*, as his only plea for mercy and acceptance. He must
put

put his hand on the head of his offering, confessing his desert of death, renouncing every self-righteous hope, and trusting simply in the sacrifice once made upon the cross. Lastly it implies, that *this one offering, thus presented, shall be available for the very chief of sinners.* God's end in sending his Son was, not only to save man, but to glorify himself in man's salvation. It is true, that all his perfections are glorified in the salvation of the most righteous : but the efficacy of this atonement, together with God's love in providing, and his mercy in accepting it, are more conspicuous in proportion as those interested in it are redeemed from deeper condemnation. To have imposed such a condition for the purpose of saving a few only of the more worthy characters, would have given us reason to apprehend, either that the mercy of God was very limited, or that there was not a sufficiency in the Redeemer's merits for the redemption of more atrocious sinners. But as these apprehensions are false and groundless, we may consider the very condition itself as importing, that the offering of Christ should be accepted for all that would trust in it.

We are not however left to conclude the efficacy of Christ's atonement from the mere circumstance of its being imposed as a condition, since, with the condition, the prophet specifies

II. The promises suspended on it.

For the purpose of arranging them in our minds, we may consider them as respecting the good of mankind, the advancement of Christ, and the glory of the Father.

The good of mankind entirely depended on Christ's performance of this condition : not one of all the human race could ever have been saved without it. Our Lord himself both confirms and illustrates this by a beautiful comparison. " Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone : but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit^a." But by dying he was to obtain a people whom he was to possess for ever as his " purchased possession." It had been

^a John xii. 24.

been foretold respecting him that "a seed should serve him; that all the ends of the earth should remember themselves and turn unto him; and that they should be counted to him for a generation ^b." By conversion they were to stand related to him as his children, as being begotten by his word and Spirit, and as receiving through him an heavenly inheritance. These he was to "see." And behold, while he was yet in the very act of offering himself, he did see the earnest and first-fruits of his future harvest: in the very hour of death he converted the dying thief, and took him that very day to dwell with him in paradise, as a monument of his victorious grace, and of his redeeming love. Nor had he long poured out his soul, when lo, another convert was born to God. No sooner did the Centurion, who had been ordered to superintend the execution, behold the manner of his death, and the signs and wonders that attended it, than he exclaimed, Truly this was a righteous man, this was the Son of God. In the space of a few days thousands confessed his power, and through the operation of his Spirit, became sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Soon the handful of corn cast on the top of the mountains sprang up like the piles of grass for number, and the cedars of Lebanon for strength ^c. Even to the present hour his family is increasing in every quarter of the globe: and soon the time shall arrive, when "a nation shall be born in a day," and that word of his shall be literally fulfilled, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." And when all the number of his elect shall have been gathered to him in successive ages, he will come and summon them all into his presence, that he may rejoice in them, and they in him, for ever and ever.

His own advancement was to be another fruit of the accomplishment of his engagements. This cannot relate to him as God, seeing that his divine nature necessarily exists in one unsuccessive eternity. But as man and as Mediator, he was to "prolong his days" in a state of glorious advancement, as a reward for terminating his days on earth under such circumstances of humiliation

^b Ps. xxii. 27, 30.

^c Ps. lxxii. 16.

humiliation and abasement. This also had been foretold in the inspired volume; "he shall live; his name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed^d." Again, in another Psalm, "Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness; thou settest a crown of pure gold upon his head. He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever^e." Accordingly, in spite of the stone, the seal, the watch, he rose triumphant, and ascended up far above all principalities and powers, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. There shall he remain seated on his glorious throne, the one source of blessedness to all his creatures, till he shall come in the clouds of heaven, and take them to himself, that they may be one fold under one shepherd for evermore. But all his glory was conditionally promised: he was first to "become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; and then he was to be highly exalted, and to have a name given him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ was Lord, to the glory of God the Father^f."

The happiness of promoting his Father's glory was to be yet a further part of his reward. The pleasure of Jehovah, yea, his chief delight, is to save sinners. This was the end he proposed to himself in his eternal counsels, when he entered into covenant with his dear Son. He has given proof of this, in that he has sworn, "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." "He willeth that *all* should be saved and come to the acknowledgment of the truth:" and, with respect to his elect, "it is his *good pleasure* absolutely to give them the kingdom^g." Nor, if we would intreat him to convert and save our souls, can we use any more suitable expressions than those of the apostle, who prays, "that he

^d Ps. lxxii. 15, 17.

^f Phil. ii. 8—11.

^e Ps. xxi. 1—5.

^g Luke xii. 32.

he would fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness ^h." But his sending of his Son, in order " that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life," is such an evidence of his love to sinners, as supersedes the necessity of any other proof, and must fill the universe with everlasting wonder and astonishment.

Now, as before the incarnation of Christ, the salvation of men was effected by the Father, so, since the coming of Christ, it has been carried on more immediately by the Son. During the first four thousand years of the world the work of conversion went on but slowly; there were few, very few, who experienced the saving efficacy of divine grace. But, when the office of rescuing sinners from the power of Satan should be devolved on Jesus, then, according to the stipulation in the text, " the pleasure of the Lord was to prosper in his hands." And how marvellously has it prospered, notwithstanding all the opposition of men and devils! There is not a day, an hour, a moment, wherein he is not beholding with joy the success of his endeavours: the ignorant are enlightened, the weak established, the doubting comforted, and all the hosts of the redeemed prepared for glory: nor shall his success be ever interrupted. To the latest period of time he shall go forth conquering, and to conquer, till all his enemies be put under his feet, and all his ransomed ones be seated on thrones of glory.

And may we not learn from this subject

1. How difficult a work is the salvation of man! Was there no other way whereby it could be effected? Could there be no remission without shedding of blood? And must that blood be the blood of God's only Son? Must he take our nature and offer himself without spot to God, before our peace could be made, or a way be opened for our restoration to happiness? Go then, ye careless ones, who think all anxiety about the soul superfluous; go read the terms of this covenant; and
see

see whether the salvation of man be so easy to be effected as you have hitherto imagined : see what a stupendous effort of wisdom and love was necessary before there was even a possibility for one of us to be saved : and, if such exertions were necessary on the part of the Father and of Christ, do ye suppose that there is no occasion for exertion on your part ? Did Christ purchase for you not merely an exemption from death and hell, but also from all solicitude about your eternal interests ? Yea, rather, do not his labours for you shew how you ought to labour for yourselves ? Awake then from your slumbers, and work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You feel the need of labouring for the bread that perisheth ; begin then to labour in good earnest for that which endureth to everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you.

2. Next observe, How wonderful was the love of Christ in undertaking such things for the effecting of your salvation ! When God declared that he had no pleasure in sacrifices and burnt-offerings, and that he must have a far nobler sacrifice than that of beasts to satisfy the demands of his justice, the Saviour instantly undertook for us, saying, “ Lo, I come to do thy will, O God ; I delight to do thy will, however painful the consequences of it may be to myself ; yea, thy law is within my heart.” He perfectly knew what it was to make his soul an offering for sin : he did not undertake it hastily, or without being apprised of the full extent of his engagements : but, foreseeing all the shame and misery that he must endure for our redemption, he undertook to effect it ; nor ever receded till he had accomplished it. Never can we sufficiently admire this astonishing love. Let us not be weary of contemplating it. Let us fix our minds upon it, and labour, if possible, to comprehend its heights and depths. Though it passes the knowledge of men and angels, yet shall our meditations on it be sweet, and our sense of it an antepast of heaven.

3. Lastly, How cheerfully should we submit to any conditions for *his* glory, who submitted to such conditions for our good ! What is it that our God requires of us ? It is simply this ; that we should repent, believe, obey.

And shall such conditions appear hard? If God had required that, in order to our final happiness, every one of us should endure the miseries of hell a thousand years, we ought to have embraced his offers of salvation with gratitude and joy; for, what are a thousand years in comparison of eternity? But when he only enjoins us to repent of those iniquities, for which the Saviour died; and to believe in him, whom the Father has set forth for a propitiation; and to obey his precepts, which are holy, just, and good; shall these injunctions be thought grievous? Shall we turn our back upon him, saying, "If I cannot be saved without all this trouble, I will not be saved at all?" Well indeed might Jesus, when the conditions of our salvation were proposed to him, have replied, "No; if man cannot be saved on lower terms than these, let him perish." But what lower terms could *we* wish for? Yea, what is there in all our duties, which does not tend even to our present happiness? Let us then embrace the gospel with all thankfulness: and let us cheerfully comply with all that God has required of us, knowing assuredly that he is faithful who hath promised, and that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

CXCIII. CHRIST'S SATISFACTION IN HIS PEOPLE.

Isai. liii. 11. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*

THE prospect of saving a ruined world was a strong inducement with our Lord to undertake the office of mediating between God and them, and afforded him rich consolation under the heavy trials he was called to endure in the execution of that office. And, now that his expectations are in a measure realized, he feels an inexpressible complacency in a retrospect upon all that he has done and suffered for our sake. It had been declared in the foregoing verse, that, after making his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed, who should be, as it were, his spiritual offspring. In the words before us the same promise is repeated, though with a
remarkable

remarkable variation in the terms ; and it is foretold that, in the accomplishment of this promise, he should feel the most abundant satisfaction.

The promise of a successful issue to his undertaking having been already considered, we shall wave every thing relating to that, and make some remarks upon *the representation which is here given of believers, and the satisfaction which our blessed Lord takes in them in that particular view.*

I. The representation here given of believers.

Of all the numberless descriptions given of believers in the holy scriptures, there is not any one so interesting as that before us. Similar ideas indeed are suggested in many passages, where mankind are spoken of as begotten of God, and as sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty : but there is a tenderness in the expression before us, which well deserves our most attentive consideration.

The image of a travailing woman is very commonly used by the inspired writers to illustrate different topics. As applied to the ungodly, it expresses the fear and terror, the distress and anguish, which they either do experience under the divine chastisements^a, or will experience, when death and judgment shall come upon them^b. As applied to the godly, it declares the relation which they bear to the church^c, to ministers^d, and to Christ himself^e. It is in this last view that we are now called to notice it.

Without entering too minutely into so delicate a subject, we may observe that believers are justly represented as the fruit of the Redeemer's travail, both *on account of their being brought into the family of God by means of his sufferings*; and *on account of his watching over them continually with more than maternal care and anxiety.*

It is solely by means of his sufferings that they are brought into the family of God. They were indeed prepared

^a Isai. xxvi. 16—18. Jer. xxx. 6, 7.

^c Isai. liv. 1. with Gal. iv. 27.

^e The text.

^b 1 Thess. v. 3.

^d Gal. iv. 19.

prepared from eternity in the womb of the divine counsels : they were “ given to Christ,” and “ chosen in him from the foundation of the world^f.” Long before the Gentiles were actually called, our Lord spake of his having many, who were not of the Jewish fold, whom yet he must in due season bring into his church^g.” And the apostle Paul, though he was so long ignorant of God, and a bitter persecutor of the church, yet speaks of himself as a chosen vessel, that had been “ separated to God from the womb^h.” But that, whereby men are really brought into the family of God, is, the crucifixion of Christ. If Christ had not “ borne their sins in his own body on the tree,” and “ made his soul too an offering for sin,” not one of them could ever have enjoyed the divine favour, not one of them could ever have presumed to cry, Abba, Father. But by his stripes they obtain healing, and peace by his chastisements, and life by his death. By his vicarious sufferings they are exempt from all the penal effects of sin, and have the power and privilege of becoming sons of Godⁱ. To this one source is the whole of their salvation continually traced in the inspired volume. Are they redeemed from the curse of the law ? it is by his having become a curse for them^k. Are they made the righteousness of God in Christ ? it is by his having been first made a sin-offering for them^l. The troubles of his soul, whether in the garden or on the cross, were the travail, of which their salvation is the fruit. And as a parent, looking on her numerous family, may call to mind the pangs which she endured at each successive birth ; so may the Lord Jesus, when he beholds the various members of his family, well recollect the sufferings which he endured by means of each ; there not being so much as one among them, who has not occasioned him many bitter pangs, not one, for whom he did not endure the wrath of an offended God.

But believers may also be called the travail of the Redeemer's soul on account of his watching over them with
more

^f John xvii. 2. Eph. i. 4.

^h Gal. i. 15.

^k Gal. iii. 13.

^g John x. 16.

ⁱ John i. 12.

^l 2 Cor. v. 21.

more than maternal care and anxiety. St. Paul speaks of himself, not only as having travailed in birth with the Galatian Christians at their first conversion, but as "travailing in birth *again* with them, until Christ should be formed in them." He saw that they were in danger of being drawn away from the faith of Christ by the false teachers who had crept in among them ; and he illustrates his anxious concern for their welfare by this affecting image. Well therefore may we apply it unto Christ, whose love to the very meanest of his children so infinitely exceeds all that the most exalted creature is capable of feeling. He sees all the dangers to which they are exposed, and all the perverseness which they manifest. He well knows how much more ready they are to follow the counsels of their deceitful adversary, than to adhere resolutely to the truth of God. How often, alas ! do they grieve his spirit by their evil deeds ! how often do they even "crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame," by acting unworthily of the relation they bear to him. If even earthly parents are sometimes so distressed by the follies and indiscretions, or by the troubles and miseries, of their dear children, that all the pangs of child-birth were as nothing in comparison of the sorrows they afterwards conflict with, much more may we consider the sympathy of Christ in our afflictions, and his grief at our misconduct, as a renewal of the troubles he sustained on Calvary. Nor are his labours destitute of their desired effect : "he heals that which was sick, and binds up that which was broken, and brings back that which was driven away^m," and, by his almighty power, "keeps them unto his heavenly kingdom." Thus, in whatever light we view believers, whether as purchased by his blood, or as preserved by his grace, we see how just is the representation given of them, as the fruit of the Redeemer's travail.

While we stand amazed at this endearing description of the Lord's people, let us consider

II. The

^m Ezek. xxxiv. 15, 16.

II. The satisfaction which Christ takes in them in this particular view.

Our blessed Lord himself, advertising his disciples of the troubles which they were to sustain by means of his removal from them, and the permanent joys that they should afterwards experience, as soon as he should renew his visits to them, illustrates his discourse by the very simile before us: "A woman, says he, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born in the world: and ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from youⁿ." Such is the satisfaction also which Christ himself is here represented as feeling, in the sight of those who are born to God through him.

He is satisfied, first, *when he beholds any penitent sinner returning unto God*. Were there but one in the whole universe, and he the meanest and the vilest of the human race, that should "bethink himself, saying, What have I done?" and should tremble at the denunciations of God's wrath, and turn to the Lord with sorrow and contrition, our compassionate Lord would instantly fix his eyes on him; according to that promise, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word^o." When his people of old began to repent of their transgressions, he was attentive to the first motions of their hearts, and declares to us with what pleasure he noticed the smallest risings of good in them; "Ephraim said, What have I to do any more with idols?" upon which the Lord immediately adds with exultation, "I have heard him, and observed him^p." So, on another occasion, as though he had been listening unobserved to the lamentations of his servant, he says, "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." Upon which his whole soul is moved with pity; and

ⁿ John xvi. 21, 22.^o Isai. lxvi. 2.^p Hos. xiv. 8.

and he exclaims, "Is not this my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; yea my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord^a." To illustrate the pleasure which he takes in the return of one sinner unto God, he expatiated upon it in three different parables. He sets forth a shepherd rejoicing over a lost sheep, and calling upon all his friends and neighbours to sympathize with him on so joyful an occasion. Then, changing the illustration to that of a woman finding a piece of silver after a long and careful search; and afterwards, to that of a father receiving his prodigal child, and making merry with him on account of the happy alteration of his state, and the blessed change wrought upon his soul, he declares, in terms as strong as language can afford, the delight he feels, when one single person is recovered unto God through him. He forgets at once all the labour and travail he has endured, or rather he looks back upon it with most heart-felt satisfaction, as soon as ever he sees it brought to a successful issue.

He is satisfied, next, *when he sees his redeemed people walking uprightly with God*. The pleasure, which a parent enjoys at the first sight of her new-born infant, is increased, when she beholds it growing up to maturity in the full enjoyment of all its faculties, and the uniform discharge of all its duties. Thus our "Lord taketh pleasure in his people;" and every grace they exercise, every service they perform, every sacrifice they offer, is "pleasing and acceptable in his sight." The beloved apostle knew no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth. So our Lord, when his people grow in grace, and make their profiting to appear, "rejoices over them with joy, and rests in his love, and joys over them with singing^b." So delighted is he with the view of them, that "he rejoices over them to do them good," and engages "with his whole heart and with his whole soul," in securing to them the everlasting possession of his heavenly kingdom^c. Though he is so high, yet hath he respect unto them, "coming to them," "manifesting himself to them

^a Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.^b Zeph. iii. 17.^c Jer. xxxii. 41.

them as he does not unto the world" in the most intimate and endearing manner, shedding abroad his love in their hearts, and maintaining fellowship with them, as a parent with her dear children. This is opened by the prophet in terms so accommodated to the text, and so beautifully descriptive of the truth before us, that we cannot refrain from quoting his words. After repeating several times, that Zion should travail in birth, and have a numerous issue, Christ calls on all of them to rejoice in their happy lot, and "to suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolation:" and then *in direct reference to himself*, he says, "then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees; as one, whom his mother comforteth, so *will I comfort you*, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem^t."

But most of all will our adorable Lord be satisfied, *when he shall behold all his family surrounding his throne in glory*. While they are here, he is too often grieved with them, and constrained to hide his face from them. But, when they shall be exalted to heaven, there will be an end of all their imperfections; they will all be pure as God is pure, and holy as God is holy: they will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father; never to suffer an eclipse, never to set again. If a parent finds all her joys consummated, when she sees those, with whom she has travailed, and over whom she has so long watched, comfortably at last settled in the world, how must Jesus rejoice, when he sees all his children settled beyond the reach of harm, in the full enjoyment of that kingdom, which was provided for them from the foundation of the world! With what satisfaction must he reflect upon the travail of his soul, when he shall see myriads, countless as the sands upon the sea shore, surrounding his throne, and hear them all acknowledging with one voice, that they were washed from their sins in his blood, and that all their happiness is the fruit of his obedience unto death! If, even in the days of his humiliation, he was so transported with this joy set before him, that, in consideration of it, he cheerfully endured the cross, and despised the shame,

^t Isai. lxvi. 7—13.

shame, much more, when he shall see the full accomplishment of his gracious purposes, will he look back upon his troubles with complacency and delight. He will then wholly occupy himself in making them happy, "feeding them" with all the fruits of Paradise, and "leading them to living fountains of waters," that they may "drink of those rivers of pleasure, which are at God's right hand for evermore^u."

By way of improving this subject, we may further observe

1. *How must the Lord Jesus be grieved when he sees sinners utterly regardless of him!* Surely if a mother, after all her pain and anguish, behold a lifeless corpse, where she had expected a living child, her disappointment must be great. And must not Jesus be grieved, when he beholds "those, for whom he died, perishing" in their sins? If when the Jews alone were offered him as the fruit of his travail, he so regretted the loss of the Gentile world, that he exclaimed, "Then have I laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain^x," doubtless it must be painful to him, after having had a promise of the heathen also for his inheritance, to see myriads, even of his professed followers, as unconcerned about him, as if he had never come into the world. And are there not many such amongst us? many, whose voice he never yet heard in fervent prayer? many, who have never yet expressed any desire after him, any concern about him? The apostle Paul could appeal to God that he had "great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethrens sake:" and Jeremiah, in the view of the troubles that were coming on his nation, cried out, "My bowels, my bowels, I am pained at my very heart:" much more therefore must the compassionate Jesus, who wept and prayed for his very murderers, be afflicted at the guilt and danger of the unbelieving world. It is true, that, strictly speaking, he is incapable of sorrow in his present state: but the scripture, to accommodate itself to our feeble apprehensions, represents him as exercising human passions, because, with respect to us, he will act as if he were either gratified by
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^u Rev. vii. 17. and Ps. xvi. 11. and xxxvi. 8.

^x Isai. xlix. 4.

our attention, or grieved by our neglect. Careless sinners are spoken of as grieving and vexing his holy spirit, yea, moreover, as crucifying him afresh, and trampling under foot his precious blood. Let not then such aggravated guilt be found in us. Let us not so requite our gracious and adorable benefactor. He yet waiteth to be gracious unto us : he seeks us, as he did the Samaritan woman, that vile notorious adulteress, that he may turn us from the error of our ways, and save our souls alive. And, as on that occasion " he had meat to eat which the world knew not of," so will his soul be refreshed and comforted with the first prospect of delivering us from sin and death.

2. *What obligations lie on all of us to repent and turn to God !* There is one way, and only one, in which we can afford any satisfaction to our blessed Lord ; and that is, by going to him for his benefits, and receiving at his hands the blessings he has purchased for us. And shall we hesitate to do this ? shall not a sense of gratitude impel us, strengthened as it is, and confirmed by a concern for our eternal interests ? If our Lord had required some great thing of us, ought we not to do it ? How much more then when he only says, Wash, and be clean ! Had he required that we should spend our whole lives in such a state of pain and travail as he himself endured, we ought gladly to comply with his will, and account ourselves happy in such an opportunity of testifying our love to him. But when he desires only, that we should seek our own truest interests, and declares, that he finds his happiness in making us happy, we should turn to him without delay, and give ourselves up to him without reserve. Hear his own word ; " The Lord taketh pleasure in them that *fear* him, in them that *hope* in his mercy." Now if you cannot love him as you would, yet if you can *fear* him ; if you cannot rejoice in an assurance of his mercy, yet if you can only *hope* in it, you will thereby afford him pleasure. And will you think this too much to do for him who travailed, as it were, in birth for you ? Repentance indeed must precede
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a sense of favour and reconciliation with God. But the deeper our contrition, the more exalted will be the joy that follows it. Let us then look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn and be in bitterness for our manifold transgressions. So shall Jesus be recompensed for all that he has endured for us; and we shall participate his glory and blessedness for ever and ever.

3. *How securely may we commit ourselves into the Saviour's hands!* If a child can be safely trusted with any one, surely it may with her, who travailed in birth with it, and who must therefore be most deeply interested in its welfare. But infinitely more secure are we in the hands of Jesus, as he himself tells us by the prophet: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Can such a monster be found? Yea, says our Lord, they may forget; yet will not I forget thee: behold, thou art graven on the palms of my hands^z." We need only commit ourselves to him, and he will approve himself faithful to his promises. He will keep us by his power; he will "guide us by his eye:" "he will carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young." "Nor shall any weapon formed against us, prosper." "Our place of defence shall be the munition of rocks: bread shall be given us, and our water shall be sure." He will "keep us as his garden; he will water it every moment; lest any hurt it; he will keep it day and night." Let us then "commit ourselves to him in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Redeemer," assured that he will "keep that which we have committed to him, and preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom."

^z Isai. xlix. 14—16.

CXCIV. THE MEANS OF OUR JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD.

Isa. liii. 11. *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

IT is not possible to conceive a more difficult question for unenlightened reason to resolve, or one in the resolution of

of which mankind are more deeply interested, than this, How shall a sinner be justified before God? Every man feels himself a sinner, and has, in a greater or less degree, a sentence of condemnation within his own bosom. And the more he considers his state, the more he feels an anxiety to know how he may escape the punishment he deserves, and secure the favour of his God and Judge. The words before us remove all doubt upon this subject: they represent Christ as God's servant, sent and commissioned for this very end, to justify sinners by the knowledge of himself; and, while they thus declare the *means* of our justification, they specify also the *ground* of it; for however gratuitous this blessing is, as it respects us, it is altogether procured for us by the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God.

Let us consider then

I. The means of our justification before God.

Christ is the person spoken of throughout this whole chapter: and here, as in the preceding chapter^a, he is denominated God's "servant." This title belongs to him only in his mediatorial capacity; for in his own nature, Christ is one with the Father, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal. The appellation of "righteous," which is here applied to him, is of peculiar force in this connexion. He was eminently righteous above every creature in earth or heaven. Of fallen men, "there is none righteous, no, not one." And though the angels are holy, yet is their righteousness not originally of and from themselves; it is the gift of God: nor is it immutable, seeing that many have fallen from it; and the preservation of those who maintain their first estate, is also the effect of God's distinguishing grace: but Christ is essentially, eternally, and immutably righteous. Moreover, angels are righteous for themselves alone; but Christ is righteous for us, having fulfilled all righteousness with the express view to impute that righteousness to us, that so we may have a righteousness wherein

^a Ver. 13.

wherein to appear before God, and God may be just in justifying us^b. The particular application of the term “righteous” to him as justifying sinners, shews, that it is to be understood in this extent, and as equivalent to that name which is elsewhere given him, “The Lord our Righteousness.”

To “justify” sinners is the work assigned him by the Father. It is his office to take even the most sinful of the human race, and so to purge them from all iniquity that they may stand before God without spot or blemish, and be regarded by him as though they never had sinned at all. This is a work which none other can perform; nor, if God had not revealed a way in which it might be done, could we have conceived it possible that such a marvellous work should ever be accomplished.

By what *means* he makes us partakers of this blessing, we are told in the words before us; it is “by or through the knowledge of himself;” he enables us to behold him as he is revealed in the scriptures, and leads us to embrace him as our all-sufficient portion. Knowledge in general has its seat in the understanding only; but the knowledge of Christ is seated both in the understanding and the heart. Hence, in order to be justified by Christ, we must not only view him as appointed of God to save us, but to this theoretical knowledge we must add the approbation of our hearts: we must have such a full persuasion of our inability to save ourselves, and of his sufficiency to save us, as determines us to renounce all dependence on an arm of flesh, and to glory in him alone. This is the knowledge of which our Lord speaks, when he says, This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent: and it is by this alone that any sinner can be justified.

Now by bringing men thus to know him and believe in him, he has justified many in all ages, and is yet daily communicating to thousands the blessings of salvation. It is true that, in comparison of the ungodly world, the justified have been but few in number, a
little

^b Rom. v. 19. and iii. 26.

little flock, a small remnant : but in the last day, when they shall all be collected together, they will be numberless like the stars of heaven, or the sands upon the sea shore. Nor is any one, however vile, excluded from the hope of justification, provided he be willing to embrace this Saviour. On the contrary, if all the people in the universe would but look to him for the ends and purposes for which he is revealed in the gospel, they should instantly experience in their souls what the wounded Israelites experienced in their bodies when they looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness : they should be delivered from all the fatal consequences of their sins, and be endued with spiritual and eternal life.

To mark more clearly the connexion between the means and the end attained by them, it will be proper to advert to

II. The ground of our justification.

The way appointed for our restoration to the divine favour is not a mere arbitrary institution of the Deity : there is a fitness in it, and a suitableness which deserves peculiar notice. It may be asked, Whence comes it that a knowledge of Christ should be the means of a sinner's acceptance with God ? What has Christ done, that he should be authorized to justify sinners by means so inadequate to their end ? In other words, supposing these means effectual to their end, what is the ground on which they become so ? To these questions the text affords us a precise and satisfactory answer.

The vicarious sacrifice of our blessed Lord has been repeatedly insisted on in the foregoing parts of this prophecy : and here it is again spoken of as the ground on which he justifies those who believe in him. For the elucidating of this point let two things be considered ;

First, *The sacrifice of Christ removes all the obstacles to our salvation.* When man had fallen, there were many things which seemed to render his restoration impossible. The law, which he had broken, denounced a curse against him ; nor could the lawgiver, however desirous he might be to rescind his decree, revoke his word consistently with his own perfections : his justice demanded

demanded satisfaction for the breach of the law; his holiness rendered it necessary that he should shew his utter abhorrence of sin; and his truth was pledged for the execution of the sentence which he had annexed to the violation of his commands; and therefore there seemed no alternative for God, no hope for man. But Christ, in becoming our surety, and bearing our iniquities in his own body, removed all these difficulties at once: he magnified the law by enduring its penalties, and made it honourable by fulfilling its commands: he also satisfied the demands of his Father's justice, truth, and holiness, and afforded to the whole creation a most awful proof, that sin could never be committed with impunity. There was indeed yet one more impediment to man's recovery. Man, having once fallen, had lost that righteousness which qualified him for the enjoyment of his God. But this also was removed in the very same way; for Christ's obedience unto death not only rendered our salvation consistent with the rights of law and justice, but constituted also a righteousness which was capable of being imputed to us; and procured for us the Holy Spirit, by whose almighty agency we are renewed after the divine image in righteousness and true holiness. Thus every obstacle to our salvation being removed by the death of Christ, that death may properly be called the ground of our justification.

But, in the next place, *the sacrifice of Christ obtained for him a right to justify whom he would.* We are often said to be "bought with a price;" and it is particularly specified, that the price paid was, the blood of Christ^c; yea, that "God purchased the church with his own blood^d." Now it is obvious, that he who purchases any thing, has a right to the thing purchased, as soon as ever he has paid the price. Thus then has Christ a right to us as "his purchased possession." Moreover, Christ is represented as a surety who has discharged our debt; who may therefore demand our liberty, and deliver us out of the hands of our adversary, who threatens to cast us into prison. Nor is this all: for, as has been observed on a foregoing

^c 1 Pet. i. 19.

^d Acts xx. 28.

foregoing part of this prophecy, God had bound himself by covenant to give him a seed; and had promised that, "if he would lay down his soul an offering for sin, the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand." Christ therefore, having fulfilled his part of the covenant, may claim the fulfilment of the Father's engagements, and, by virtue of the authority committed to him, may reveal himself to sinners in order to their eternal salvation. Thus, whether we consider the justification of sinners as obtained for them, or imparted to them, the death of Christ must be acknowledged as the true and only ground of it.

These points being so fully opened in other parts of this chapter, we may wave any further discussion of them, and propose for adoption such a line of conduct as shall ensure to every one the blessing here spoken of.

1. *Let us read the scriptures with care and diligence.*

The holy scriptures are the only fountain of divine knowledge. They are a kind of map, whereby we may find our way through this trackless desert, and arrive in safety at our Father's house. Our Lord says, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." Let us then not merely read them, but attend particularly to the testimony which they bear to Christ. Nor let us peruse them in a cursory manner, as though they needed no study or investigation; but rather let us examine them with deep attention, as we would a will or testament by which our title to a large inheritance was to be determined. What a succession of hopes and fears would arise in our breasts, when we read in such a will the passages that appeared prosperous or adverse; and what diligence should we use to make our title clear! How glad should we be to consult those who could give us information on the subject, and what a deep impression would their opinion make upon our minds, particularly if it were grounded on authentic records, and established cases! Such is the way in which we should search the holy oracles for ourselves, and hear them expounded to us by others: nor should we ever rest till we can prove out of them, by indisputable evidence, our right and title to the heavenly inheritance. Happy would it be for us,
if

if we thus sought the knowledge of Christ! we should soon be guided into all truth: and be made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

But while we thus read the scriptures,

2. *Let us pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit.*

To unenlightened man the scriptures are “a sealed book;” nor, however learned he may be in other sciences, can he attain the knowledge of Christ, unless the holy Spirit shine into his heart to give him that knowledge^c. If we look at a sun-dial, we may understand the use and import of the figures; yet can we not attain a knowledge of the time unless the sun shine upon it. So it is with respect to the word of God: we may understand the general meaning of the words; yet can we not receive its spiritual instructions, unless we have that “unction of the Holy One, whereby we may know all things.” The words of Christ “are spirit and life;” and a spiritual discernment is necessary in order to a just apprehension of their import^f. St. Paul had studied the scriptures diligently, but could never find Christ in them, till the light shone upon him from heaven, and the scales fell from his eyes. The apostles had been instructed by our Lord himself between three and four years; and yet could not enter into the truths which the prophets and Christ himself had declared, till “he opened their understandings to understand the scriptures.” Nor, with all our advantages, have we any more power to comprehend his truth; for he expressly tells us, that “no man knoweth either the Father or the Son, except the Holy Spirit reveal him unto us^g.” Hence for the attainment of divine knowledge we are directed to combine a dependence on God’s spirit with our own researches: “if thou earnest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God; for the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding^h.” Let us then not presume to separate what God has thus united,

^c 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^g Matt. xj. 27.

^f 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^h Prov. ii. 3—6.

united, but pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

There is yet another direction, which it is of infinite importance to attend to, namely,

3. *Let us guard against self-righteousness.*

There is no evil, that cleaves more closely to our nature than self-righteousness. We are always wanting to be justified by some other way than that proposed in the text. Like Naaman, if some great thing were required of us, we should gladly do it; but when it is said to us, "Wash and be clean," "Believe and be saved," we turn away in disgust. The very simplicity of this fundamental truth offends us. Were we told that we must *work* diligently, and become *godly* in order to obtain justification, we should think the direction safe and proper: but the scripture account of the way of being justified is directly opposite to this: St. Paul says, that "to him that *worketh not*, but believeth on him that justifieth the *ungodly*, his faith is counted for righteousnessⁱ:" and this appears so strange, that men cannot, and will not admit it. But the apostles themselves could not obtain justification in any other way, than by renouncing all their own righteousness, and by going as *ungodly* and perishing sinners unto Christ, that they might be accepted through him alone. This is affirmed by St. Paul himself, who says, "We, who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, *even we* have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified^k." Let us then guard against every species and degree of self-righteousness, and look for justification solely through the knowledge of Christ, and by faith in his all-atoning sacrifice.

4. *Let us, however, be careful to shew forth our faith by our works.*

Because we say, That we are not to work at all *with a view to obtain justification by our works*, but that we must accept justification freely as ungodly and perishing sinners,

ⁱ Rom. iv. 5.

^k Gal. ii. 15, 16.

sinners, must we be understood to say, That men need not to work at all, but are at liberty to continue ungodly? No, by no means. We maintain the absolute necessity both of diligence and of universal godliness: we only deny to these things the office of justifying the soul. We declare to all, that they must be daily “working out their salvation with fear and trembling,” and that “faith without works is dead.” Let this then be borne in mind; There is and can be, but one way of a sinner’s justification before God, and that is, by the knowledge of Christ, and faith in his name: but this free salvation, so far from giving any licence for sloth and wickedness, is the strongest incentive to holiness, and the greatest possible obligation to good works. Let us then shew forth our faith by our works. In this way we may be justified by our *works*, even as Abraham and Rahab were¹; that is, we may evince the reality of our faith, and the sincerity of our hearts. Thus shall we assign to faith and works their proper offices, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

¹ Jam. ii. 21, 25. compared with Rom. iv. 2, 3, 6.

CXCV. THE FRUIT OF CHRIST’S DEATH AND INTERCESSION.

Isai. liii. 12. *Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong: because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

IT is at this time, as it has also been in all former ages, an objection frequently urged against the true disciples of Christ, that few, if any, of the wise and noble embrace their sentiments. When our blessed Lord himself ministered on earth, it was asked with scornful triumph, “Have any of the rulers and of the Pharisees believed on him?” But, if we confess, with the apostle, that “not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called,” we must resolve the difficulty into the sovereign will of

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God,

God, who has "chosen the foolish and weak things of the world, to confound the wise and mighty, and the base and contemptible things of the world, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." There is, however, a period fixed in the divine counsels, when the great and mighty, as well as others, shall become obedient to the faith: and to that event the prophet directs our attention in the text. According to the present translation indeed the Lord Jesus is represented as dividing the spoil *in concert with the great*: but it should rather be translated, "I will divide him *the great for a portion*, and he shall divide *the strong for a spoil*." Agreeably to this sense of the words, we are led to view him as a victorious monarch, triumphing over all the potentates on earth, and both seizing them for his spoil, and enjoying them for his portion.

In illustrating this passage, it will be proper to consider

I. The promise made to Christ.

The conversion of the world to Christ is a frequent subject of prophecy: whole chapters are occupied in describing it^b: we are told that the power of godliness shall one day pervade all ranks of people "from the least even to the greatest;" and that kings will account it their highest honour to be "the nursing-fathers of the church, and queens her nursing-mothers." This was fulfilled in part in the apostles' days, when many persons of rank and power embraced the truth. But it was yet further accomplished in the time of Constantine, when the Roman empire professed subjection to the gospel; and the religion of Christ became the established religion of the world. Since that time the chief princes of Europe have called themselves by the name of Christ, and wished to be esteemed his followers. It is true indeed that far the greater part of them have only called him Lord, Lord, while they have had no desire to do the things which he commands: still, however, their very professions of regard to his name are sufficient to shew

^a See Vitrina in loc. or Bp. Lowth.

^b Isai. xlix. and lx.

shew what we may expect, when God shall make bare his arm, and go forth in the chariots of the everlasting gospel, conquering and to conquer. The time shall come when "Christ shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth; when all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him^c."

But the terms in which this promise is expressed deserve a more minute attention. The kingdom of Christ, considered as "a portion which the Father divides unto him," is the Father's gift; but, as "a spoil which Christ divides unto himself," it is the fruit of his own conquests. In both these views we must regard the conversion of men to Christ. None, whether high or low, learned or unlearned, ever yield themselves up unfeignedly to him, but in consequence of their having been already given to him by the Father: "they make not themselves to differ; nor has one, more than another, aught, which he has not received." "As none *can* come unto Christ, except the Father draw them," so none *will* come to him, except God have both given them to Christ, and afterwards given to themselves an inclination and desire to be the Lord's. Nor is this a mere speculative truth; it lies at the very root of all religion: we never can be duly humbled till we see ourselves destitute of all will and ability to serve the Lord; and acknowledge from our hearts, that "it is God alone who giveth us either to will or to do" that which is good. Till then, we can never in sincerity refer all the glory of our salvation to God alone: we shall, of necessity, be assuming part of it to ourselves. Our Lord expressly mentions this truth no less than seven times in his intercessory prayer^d, which he uttered in the presence of his disciples. What greater proof of its importance can be given? And how needful is it for us also to remember it in all our addresses at the throne of grace!

It is further noticed in the text, that the conversion of men is also a fruit of the Redeemer's conquests. As Canaan, though given to Abraham and his posterity, was
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^c Ps. lxxij. 8—11.

^d John xvii.

to be gained by the sword, so we, however given by the Father to Christ, must be rescued by force out of the hands of our enemies : if Christ will possess us as “ a portion,” he must take us as “ a spoil.” The god of this world had usurped a power over us, and, like a strong man armed, kept us under his control. It was therefore necessary that Christ, who was “ stronger than he, should overcome him, and take from him the armour wherein he trusted, and divide the spoils.” Accordingly he engaged with all the powers of darkness, and, “ by death, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” On his cross “ he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” In his ascension “ he led captivity itself captive ;” and thus delivered us from the power of his great adversary. Not that his warfare is yet accomplished, though the form of it is altered ; for he has still to subdue the rebellion of our hearts. We ourselves are up in arms against him : and, when driven out of one strong hold, we flee to another, till he has cast them all down, and swept away every refuge of lies. We yield not, till his arrows are fixed deeply in our hearts ; we submit not, till he has “ made us willing in the day of his power.” Never, till his right hand and his holy arm, have gotten him the victory, are our “ thoughts and desires brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

By these united means then is Christ's kingdom to be extended : nor, when once they are combined, shall all the powers of earth and hell withstand their influence. However desperate the condition of any may appear, though they should have sold themselves to work iniquity, and become in a peculiar sense, “ the lawful prey” of Satan, yet shall they be rescued, like Lot, from their victorious captors^f. This very difficulty is both stated and answered by the prophet : “ Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered ? ” Yes ; “ thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered : for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children^g.”

Previous

^e Luke xi. 22.

^f Gen. xiv, 14—16.

^g Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

Previous to the accomplishment of this promise, Christ was to purchase the church with his own blood: "he was to make his soul an offering for sin, and, after that, to see a seed" given to him for a portion^b. Such was the tenor of the covenant which the Father entered into with his Son. But the prophet, foreseeing the execution of Christ's work, as if it were already completed, speaks of it as finished; and states the execution of his part of the covenant, as the ground, on which he might expect the accomplishment of the Father's part towards him. In further investigating this promise, it will be proper more fully to consider

II. The grounds of it.

The death and intercession of Christ comprehend the whole of that work, which Christ was to perform on earth and in heaven for the redemption of man. And, they being *virtually* accomplished from the foundation of the world, our blessed Lord had a right to his purchase, and a claim upon the Father's honour for the performance of the engagements stipulated on his part.

In this view *the death of Christ* is first mentioned in the text; "*Therefore* will I divide him a portion, *because*" he died. But it was not sufficient that Christ should die; he must die in a particular manner, and for particular ends. Was an atonement necessary to reconcile the Father to us? his death must be *sacrificial*. Was everlasting shame the portion we had merited? his death must be *ignominious*. Was it necessary for the honour of God's government that sin should be punished in the sight of the whole universe? his death must be *judicial*. Now it was in this very manner, and for these very ends, that Jesus died. The sacrifices under the law had their blood shed, and poured out at the foot of the altar: and Jesus, our sacrifice, shed his blood from every pore of his body, and "poured out his soul unto death." To mark the ignominy that he was to endure for us, "he was numbered with transgressors" of the most atrocious character, and crucified between two thieves; as though, instead of being the Lord of glory, he was the vilest

^b Ver. 10.

vilest of the human race. And, lastly, to make full satisfaction to divine Justice, he died under the load of our iniquities, and bare in his own person the curse and condemnation due to them.

Here then is one ground on which we may expect assuredly the conversion of sinners to him. Has he fulfilled his covenant engagements in every part, and shall the Father violate his engagements to him? Has he performed his work, and shall he not receive his wages? Has he paid down the price, and shall he not enjoy his purchased possession? Were multitudes expressly given to him on purpose that he might redeem them, and shall they never partake of his redemption? Was he himself exalted far above all principalities and powers, and entrusted with gifts that he might bestow them on the rebellious; yea, was all fulness of blessings committed to him on purpose that he might impart them, in rich abundance, to his ransomed people, and will he not exercise his power for these ends? We may be assured, that if there be any faithfulness in God the Father, or any power in the Lord Jesus Christ, there shall be "a gathering of sinners to our adorable Shiloh." The rich and powerful, as well as the poor and weak, shall turn unto him; they shall submit to his government, and devote themselves to his glory.

The other ground, on which the increase and aggrandizement of Christ's kingdom may be expected, is *the intercession of Christ*; "*Therefore will I divide him a portion, because he made intercession for the transgressors.*" The intercession of Christ was that part of his work which he was to carry on in heaven, after he should have finished the work which was committed to him on earth. The high priest, who typically represented Christ, was first to kill the sacrifice, then to carry the blood within the vail, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and then to burn incense before the mercy-seat: nor, till this last ceremony was performed, was the rest of any avail: it was not till after he had covered the mercy-seat with the clouds of incense, that he had any authority to bless the people. Thus was our Lord, not only to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin, and to enter into heaven with

with his own blood, but he was to make intercession for us at the right hand of God. This was stipulated between the Father and him as one part of the condition, on which the conversion of sinners was to depend; "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession ¹." Now the prophet seeing this part of Christ's office, as it were, already fulfilled, declares its efficacy towards the salvation of men, and represents it as another ground for the performance of the Father's promise. In this view the intercession of Christ is often mentioned in the holy scriptures. It is put altogether on a par with the death of Christ as the procuring cause of our salvation: it is said, "He died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification ^k." In one place a decided preference is given to it, as being, if possible, even more influential toward the acceptance of men than the death of Christ itself; "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, *rather* that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us ^l." His death is spoken of as effecting nothing without; "If Christ be not risen, we are yet in our sins; and they, who are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished ^m:" nor is this all: his sufficiency for the wants and necessities of his people is represented as turning upon this hinge, as standing upon this ground; "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them ⁿ." Let his intercession then be considered in this view: did the Father hear him always when he was on earth, and will he not hear him now that he is in heaven? Did Moses, a sinner like ourselves, arrest, as it were, the arm of Omnipotence, and avert God's vengeance from the idolatrous Jews ^o, and shall not the prayers of Jesus equally prevail? Did the efficacy of his intercession appear on the day of Pentecost in the conversion of thousands, and shall it not be further manifested in the salvation of all whose cause he pleads? Surely, if we have but faith to believe, we may already see

¹ Ps. ii. 8.¹ Rom. viii. 34.² Heb. vii. 25.^k Rom. iv. 25.ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 17, 18.^o Exod. xxxii.

see "the glory of the Lord risen upon the church, and the Gentiles coming to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising."

Let us then learn from this subject *the importance of Christ's mediation*. On this every thing depends: without *this*, there never had been a gleam of hope for any, whether rich or poor. Satan would have retained his power over us, and would have been, as it were, the jailer, to carry us to prison, or the executioner to inflict upon us the torments we deserve. But because Christ poured out his soul unto death, our souls shall live for ever: because he was numbered with transgressors, we shall be numbered with the saints: because he bore our sins, we shall never have one sin laid to our charge: because he liveth to make intercession for us, we shall receive all the blessings of grace and glory. Let us then make his work our trust, our confidence, and our plea. Let us urge it with the Father on our behalf, that we may be given to Christ as his portion, and enjoyed by him as his spoil. Nor let us be discouraged by the thought that we are transgressors, as though the greatness of our transgressions were any bar to our acceptance; for, it is *for* transgressors that he intercedes; and, if we feel ourselves to be of that number (provided we hate and turn from our transgressions) we may be well assured, that our iniquity shall not be our ruin. "Be wise therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth: *kiss the Son*, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way^p."

This subject may yet further shew us *the security of those who are interested in Christ's mediation*.

The believer's security depends not on the perfection of his own work, or the fidelity of his own promises (for who does not see continual reason to lament his own imperfections and unfaithfulness?) but rather on the perfection of Christ's work, and the faithfulness of God. And who can find a flaw in either? What is there that Christ has not done for the complete redemption of our souls? Or who ever trusted in God and was confounded?

Let

Let us not fear then though earth and hell conspire against us. Let us rather adopt the triumphant language of the apostle, "Who is he that shall lay any thing to our charge? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us." We may rest satisfied that he is faithful, who hath promised; and that, as the heroes of old hung up their trophies in the temples of their gods, so Christ will take us to heaven as the fruit of his victories, the everlasting monuments of his power and grace. Let us then "hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end." Let us "believe in the Lord; so shall we prosper; let us believe his prophets; and so shall we be established."

CXCVI. OUR LORD'S COMPLAINT ON THE CROSS.

Ps. xxii. 1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

THE prophecies relating to our Lord have not only declared what works he should do, and what sufferings he should endure, but even the very words that should be uttered both by his enemies and himself—Whatever reference the words of the text might have to David, there can be no doubt but that they principally relate to the Lord Jesus; and in him they received their accomplishment: when he had hung about six hours upon the cross, we are told, "he cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me^a?" Perhaps he cried with a loud voice in order to shew, that his natural strength was by no means exhausted; and that his dissolution, which immediately followed, was voluntary: but he discovered also by that the intenseness of his sufferings, and fulfilled in the minutest manner the prediction before us—Waving
all

^a Matt. xxvii. 46.

all illustration of the text as applicable to David, we shall endeavour to elucidate it as accomplished in his great *antitype*, and shall consider

I. The occasion of our Lord's complaint

Jesus in the hour of his extremity was forsaken of his heavenly Father

[We are not to suppose that the Godhead actually separated itself from his manhood; but that the sensible manifestation of the divine presence was withheld from him—This was necessary in various points of view—A banishment from the divine presence was part of the punishment due to sin; and therefore it must be inflicted on him who had become the surety and substitute of sinners—Occasional suspensions also of the *tokens* of God's love are the means whereby God perfects the work of faith in his people's hearts: and "it behoved Jesus to be made like unto us in all things:" "though he was a son, yet he must learn" the nature and the difficulty of "obedience (yea, and be made perfect too) through sufferings^b"—Nor could he properly sympathize with us, which as our great High Priest he ought to do, unless he himself should endure the very temptations, which we, in our measure, are called to sustain^c—]

But though there was good reason for it, it was a just ground of complaint

[Never had he endured any thing like this before: when he said, "Now is my soul troubled, it is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," a voice was uttered from heaven; "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased:" when he agonized in the garden, an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him: but now that he was more fiercely than ever assaulted by all the powers of darkness, his heavenly Father also seemed to conspire with them, and withdrew the only consolation that remained for his support—What a dreadful aggravation of his sufferings must this have been! To cry, and even "roar" for help, and find God "far from helping him!" to have him, in whose bosom he had lain from all eternity, hide his face from him! How could he but complain?—Surely in proportion as he loved his heavenly Father, he could not but bewail the hidings of his face—]

Lest however we should form a wrong conception of our Lord's conduct, let us consider

II. The

^b Heb. ii. 10, 17, 18. and v. 7—9.

^c Heb. iv. 15.

II. The complaint itself

Let us not suppose that there was the smallest mixture of impatience in it

[When our Lord first undertook to stand in the place of sinners, he said, "I delight to do thy will, O God"—When the cup of God's wrath was put into his hand, he still acquiesced; and, though his human nature shrunk back back for a while from the conflict, he committed himself to God, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done"—Nor was the complaint uttered on the cross any other than what every good man, under the hidings of God's face, both *may*, and *ought* to utter^d.—]

It expressed the fullest confidence in God, and exhibited the brightest pattern to all his tempted people

[Not for one moment does Jesus doubt his relation to his heavenly Father, as *we*, alas! are too apt to do in seasons of deep affliction—His repetition of that endearing name, "My God, my God," shews how stedfastly he maintained his faith and confidence; and teaches us, that, "when we are walking in darkness and have no light, we should trust in the Lord, and stay ourselves upon our God"—]

We may improve the subject by considering

III. The lessons we may learn from it

There is not any part of doctrine or experience which will not receive light from this subject—But we shall content ourselves with observing from it

1. The greatness of Christ's love

[Truly the love of Christ has heights and depths that can never be explored—He knew from eternity all that he should endure, yet freely offered himself for us, nor ever drew back from his engagements: "Having loved his own he loved them to the end"—But never shall we form any just conceptions of his love, till we behold that glory which he left for our sakes, and see, in the agonies of the damned, the miseries he endured—But when the veil shall be taken from our eyes, how marvellous will his love appear! and with what acclamations will heaven resound!—]

2. The duty of those who are under the hidings of his face

[Our enjoyment of Christ's presence is variable, and often intermitted: but let us not on that account be discouraged—Let us pray, and that too with strong crying and tears; yea,
let

^d Ps. lxxvii. 1—3. and lxxxviii. 9, 10, 14.

let us expostulate with him, and ask, like Job, "wherefore dost thou contend with me?"—But though we say, "The Lord hath forsaken me," let us never add, like the church of old, "my Lord hath *forgotten* me"—If he hide himself, "it is but for a little moment, that he may gather us with everlasting mercies"^f—Therefore let us say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"—]

3. The misery of those who are not interested in his atonement

[We see what bitter lamentation sin occasioned in him, who bore the iniquities of others, even though he knew that his sufferings would quickly end: what wailing then and gnashing of teeth will they experience, who shall perish under their own personal guilt, when they shall be shut up as monuments of God's wrath to all eternity^g!—Would to God that careless sinners would lay this to heart, while yet a remedy remains, and before they be finally separated from their God by an impassable gulf!—]

^e Job x. 2.

^f Isai. liv. 7, 8.

^g Luke xxiii. 31.

CXCVII. THE MEANS OF EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE.

Zech. xii. 10. *I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look on me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him, as one that mourneth for his only son, and be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.*

REPENTANCE is a subject, with which every one supposes himself to be sufficiently acquainted, but which is indeed very rarely understood. The scriptures speak of a repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of^a; intimating thereby, that there is a repentance, which is not unto salvation; and which therefore itself needs to be repented of. The text in this view deserves our deepest attention, since it opens to us

I. The nature of evangelical repentance

The sorrow, produced in the heart of a true penitent, is exceeding deep

[Nothing

^a 2 Cor. vii. 10.

[Nothing can be more pungent than the grief of a parent who has lost "his first-born," "his only son^b." Yet to that is the mourning of a penitent *twice* compared. In either case, the soul is bowed down greatly; it is indisposed for receiving gratifications from those vanities, with which it was before amused; and loves to indulge in pensive solitude, and painful reflections. The parent's anguish indeed may be softened by the assiduities of surviving friends; and may wholly lose its pungency through the lapse of time. But nothing can mitigate the pangs of a wounded spirit, nothing silence the accusations of a guilty conscience, till "the balm of Gilead," the blood of Jesus, be applied to it: nor even then will sin ever cease to be the grief and burthen of the soul^c.]

But repentance is then only to be called evangelical, when it has immediate respect to Christ

[*Twice* is it said in the text, that men shall mourn "*for him*," that is, for Christ^{cc}. Not that the miseries, which Christ endured on the cross, are the proper grounds of a penitent's sorrow; but rather, it is his grief that he has so dishonoured Christ by his sins, and that he has yet again and again "crucified him afresh" by continuing in sin. Many, who are not really humbled, are concerned for their sins as having subjected them to God's displeasure^d; but it is the true penitent alone, who mourns for sin, as dishonouring Christ, and as counteracting all the gracious purposes of his love.]

This will more fully appear by considering

II. The means by which it is to be attained

The effusion of the Spirit is the *primary* means of producing penitence in our hearts

[The Holy Spirit is called "the spirit of grace and of supplication," because he is the author and giver of all grace, and because it is through his agency alone that we are able to pray. And this spirit Christ will "pour out" upon us. He not only has a right to send the Holy Spirit, as being God equal with the Father, but in his mediatorial capacity he is authorized and empowered to send forth the Spirit, "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost," on purpose that he may impart to us out of his own immeasurable fulness. To him all *must* look for this blessing^e; and all *may* look with an assurance of obtaining it, provided they truly and earnestly desire it^f. The great and learned, "the house of David," must submit themselves to his influence; nor shall the

^b Luke vii. 12.

^c Ezek. xvi. 63.

^{cc} Compare John xix. 37.

^d Exod. x. 16, 17. 1 Kings xxi. 29.

^e Acts v. 31.

^f John xiv. 13—17.

the poorest or most illiterate of “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” be destitute of this mercy, if they will but ask it of their heavenly Father^g. Nor till this Spirit convince us of our sin, can any of us know our state, so as to be suitably and abidingly affected with it^h.]

As a *secondary* mean, the Spirit turns our eyes unto a crucified Saviour

[Nothing but a view of Christ as dying for us, can ever thoroughly break our obdurate hearts. But this has a powerful tendency to produce ingenuous sorrow; because, while it shews us the malignity of sin in most awful colours, it discovers to us also the remedy provided for the expiation of sin. In the one view, we are humbled by a sense of our extreme vileness; in the other, we are overwhelmed with a sense of the Redeemer’s love: and a combination of these two effects constitutes that ingenuous shame and sorrow, which may be denominated evangelical repentance.]

We may IMPROVE this subject

1. For conviction

[All acknowledge that they need repentance, and profess an intention to repent. But let not any imagine that the slight acknowledgments, and faint purposes of amendment, which are usually made on dying beds, are sufficient. If the comparison in the text be just, nothing will suffice, but a heart broken and contrite under a sense of sin. And precisely such is the view which the apostles also give of true repentanceⁱ. O that we may never rest in any thing short of such repentance, lest, instead of looking now on Christ with salutary contrition, we behold him hereafter (as we must do) with endless and unavailing sorrow^k.]

2. For encouragement

[Many are discouraged by reason of the hardness and obduracy of their hearts. Indeed we all feel, that notwithstanding we have so much cause to weep day and night for our sins, and are really desirous to do so, we can rarely, if ever, bring our souls to any measure of tenderness and grief. But let us look more at Christ as dying for us; and not confine our attention, as we too often do, to our sins. Let us particularly beg of Christ to pour out his Spirit upon us, and then the heart of stone shall soon give way to an heart of flesh^l. The Spirit of grace and of supplications will easily effect, what, without his aid, is impossible to man: and the rocky heart, once struck by him, shall yield its penitential streams through all this dreary wilderness^m.]

^g Luke xi. 13. ^h John xvi. 7, 8. ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 11. Jam. iv. 9.

^k Rev. i. 7. ^l Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ^m Alluding to Numb. xx. 11.

CXCVIII. CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND GLORY.

Ps. xvi. 8—11. *I have set the Lord always before me : because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth : my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell ; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life : in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

IF the people of God had hope only in this life, they would be in a most pitiable condition ; because they are debarred by conscience from the pleasures of sin, and are exposed to a multitude of trials on account of their religion. But their views of immortality bear them up, so that the sufferings of this present time appear to them insignificant, and unworthy of any serious concern. The Psalmist penned this Psalm under some deep affliction ; which, however, lost all its force as soon as ever he directed his views to the eternal world.

But the words before us can scarcely be applied at all to David in his own person : they are spoken by him rather in the person of Christ, whom he typically represented ; and to whom, in the New Testament, they are expressly, repeatedly, and exclusively applied. In this view they are a most remarkable prophecy relating to Christ ; and they declare

I. His support in life

In an assurance of his Father's continual aid, he was unmoved by any difficulties

[Various were the trials which Jesus was called to endure ; but in all he preserved a perfect equanimity. When his sufferings were fast approaching, he spake of them without any emotions of fear^a : when dissuaded from exposing himself to them, he was indignant at the proposal^b : when warned of Herod's murderous intentions, he poured contempt on his feeble, unavailing efforts^c : when standing before Pilate's tribunal he witnessed a good confession^d ; and, alike unmoved by hopes or fears, informed his judge, that the authority exercised by him, was both given, and limited by a superior power.

^a Matt. ix. 18, 19.

^b Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

^c Luke xiii. 31—35.

^d John xviii. 37. 1 Tim. vi. 13.

power^e. He saw God as ever present to succour and support him; and was well assured, that as nothing could be done but according to *his* determinate counsel, so *his* aid should be all-sufficient for him^f. Hence in the whole of his deportment he maintained an invincible firmness, a dignified composure. At all times he acted on the principles described in such glowing colours by the prophet Isaiah, and fulfilled in the utmost extent *his* prophecy concerning him^g.]

Nor need the weakest of his members fear, if they look for support from the same quarter

[Many of God's people have experienced the very same support as was enjoyed by Christ. David's friends endeavoured to create in his mind desponding fears: but his confidence in an almighty protector kept him stedfast^h; and determined him to preserve an undaunted spirit, however great or multiplied his trials might beⁱ. Paul also, in the view of certain and accumulated troubles, could say, "None of these things move me^k." Thus may every believer triumph. The man who trusts in God is in an impregnable fortress, that has salvation for walls and bulwarks^l. If only our eyes be opened to see clearly, we may behold ourselves, like Elisha, encompassed with chariots of fire and horses of fire; and may laugh at the impotent attempts of men or devils^m.]

The more immediate scope of the prophecy is to declare

II. His comfort in death

Our blessed Lord submitted cheerfully to his death in a certain expectation of a speedy resurrection

[Greatly as he was oppressed and overwhelmed with sorrow, he yet restrained not his tongueⁿ from joyful acknowledgments. His last discourses, and his intercessory prayer, abundantly testify the composure of his spirit, and the elevation of his mind. Look we for the ground of his consolation? we shall find it in those repeated expressions, "I go to my Father;" "Father, I come to thee^o." He knew that his flesh, that holy thing formed in the virgin's womb^p, and given for the life of the world^q, should never become

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^e John xix. 11.

^g Isai. l. 7—9.

ⁱ Ps. xxxvii. 1, 3.

^l Isai. xxvii. 1. Ps. cxxv. 1, 2.

ⁿ This is meant by "my glory" rejoiceth.

^o John xvi. 28. and xvii. 11.

^q John vi. 51.

^f Ps. lxxxix. 21. Isai. xlii. 1.

^h Ps. xi. 1—4.

^k Acts xx. 23, 24.

^m 2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

^p Luke i. 35.

an abomination^r, but that, though immured in the silent tomb, it should be raised thence, before it could corrupt : and that his soul, though separate from it for a season, should soon be reunited to it, to be joint partakers of the same kingdom and glory.]

Such consolation too have all his members in a dying hour

[Christ rose, not as a private individual, but as “ the first-fruits of them that slept ^a.” And every one that believes in him may consider death as a sleep, and the grave as a bed whereon they rest ^t till the morning of the resurrection. The bodies of the saints are indeed doomed to death and corruption on account of sin ^u: but they shall be raised again, and fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body ^x: this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality ^y. In expectation of this, the martyrs of old would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection ^z: and, in the hope of it, we also may put off this tabernacle with joy, knowing that it shall be reared anew in a far better form ^a.]

Connected with this hope in his death, we behold

III. His prospect in eternity

The state to which Jesus was to rise was a state of inconceivable and endless glory

[No sooner were death and the grave vanquished by Jesus in the resurrection, and he was thereby “ declared to be the Son of God with power,” than the way to the regions of glory was opened to him ; that way, which, with myriads of attendant angels, he trod soon afterwards, that he might receive all the fruits of his victorious death. Then sat he down at the right hand of his Father, not any more to taste a cup of sorrow, but to possess a fulness and perpetuity of unutterable joy. Blessed prospect ! well might he be animated by it in the midst of all his trials ; and, for the joy set before him, endure the cross, and despise the shame ^b.]

Such too are the delightful prospects of all his saints

[They see, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the way to heaven opened : and, if they look to him as the resurrection and the life ^c, a fulness and perpetuity of joy awaits

^r Christ’s resurrection on the third day was typified by that law, Lev. vii. 17, 18.

^t Acts vii. 60. Isai. lvii. 2.

^x Phil. iii. 21.

^z Heb. xi. 35.

^a Heb. xii. 2.

^a 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^u Rom. viii. 10.

^y 1 Cor. xv. 53, 54.

^z 2 Cor. v. 1, 2.

^c John xi. 25, 26.

awaits them also at their departure hence. Who can conceive what happiness they will feel in the vision and fruition of their God^d? Well may they long "to depart, that they may be with Christ;" and account all their afflictions light and momentary, in the view of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, with which they will be crowned in the day of the Lord Jesus^e.]

INFER

1. What rich sources of consolation does faith open to believers under all their troubles!

[Faith beholds God always present, always active, to succour his people: it looks forward also to the future state both of body and soul, enabling us to weigh the concerns of time and eternity in the scale together, and thereby to see the vanity of the one in comparison of the other. To be happy therefore, we must live by faith.]

2. How certain is the salvation of those who believe in Christ!

[If Jesus be the Messiah, and have in himself a sufficiency for the salvation of his people, then have we nothing to do but to believe in him. But St. Peter, quoting the entire text, infers from it the certainty of his Messiahship^f; and St. Paul, referring to the same, infers his sufficiency to save his people^g. Let us then make him our refuge, our foundation, and our ALL.]

^d Rev. xxi. 3, 4, 21, 22.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

^f Acts ii. 25—28, and 36.

^g Acts xiii. 35—37, and 38, 39.

CXCIX. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST GLAD TIDINGS.

Acts xiii. 32, 33. *We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

THE resurrection of Christ was the foundation, whereon the whole edifice of our religion was built. To that Jesus himself directed his disciples to look forward as the evidence of his Messiahship; and, after he had risen, he appeared to them repeatedly for the space of forty days, that they might be enabled to testify of it with the fullest assurance. A select number were chosen by him for the very purpose of bearing witness to this wonderful

wonderful event: and because St. Paul had not enjoyed the same advantage as the other apostles, he was favoured with a vision of his Lord long after his removal from the sight of all other mortals, in order that he, as well as the others, might be able to testify of it from ocular demonstration.

In the words before us he speaks of Christ's resurrection

I. As an accomplishment of prophecy

The passage quoted by the apostle is very properly applied to this subject

[The Psalms were in the apostle's days arranged in the same order as they now are. And the scope of the second Psalm is to declare the triumph of Jesus over all his enemies by means of his resurrection from the grave, and of his consequent exaltation to the right hand of God. And he might well be said to be "begotten" in the day of his resurrection, because he was then formed anew, as it were, from the earth.]

It is confirmed also by many other passages that predict the same truth

[As it was foreordained by God, so it was foretold in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was exhibited in types^a, and sometimes in prophecies^b. In one scripture, not quoted indeed in this place, but cited no less than six times in the New Testament, this marvellous event was predicted in terms so plain that none could misunderstand it, who did not obstinately shut their eyes against the truth^c.]

We must not however suppose this to be an uninteresting fact: for the apostle further speaks of it

II. As

^a Isaac being put to death, as it were, by his own father, was *received again from the dead* in a figure, Heb. xi. 19. Jonah was raised again on the third day from the belly of a fish, Matt. xii. 39, 40. The living bird that was let loose after having been dipped in the blood of the bird that had been slain, represented Jesus as ascending to heaven with his own blood, Lev. xiv. 51, 53. with Heb. ix. 12.

^b Ver. 34, 35. with Isai. lv. 3. which certainly must include the resurrection of him that was to be "the leader and commander;" and Ps. xvi. 10. which is so largely commented upon by St. Peter, Acts ii. 26—31.

^c Ps. cxviii. 22. with Luke xx. 17.

II. As glad tidings to the soul

To the disconsolate disciples the tidings of Christ's resurrection were doubtless exceeding joyful. But they ought to be no less so to us, since that event ascertains

1. The virtue of his sacrifice

[Had he not risen, his death had been in vain^d. We could have had no evidence that our debt was discharged, if our surety had not been liberated from the prison of the grave. But his resurrection clearly proved that he had satisfied the demands of law and justice, and it thereby affords us a ground of assured hope, and triumphant exultation^e.]

2. His sufficiency for our help

[If he were still dead, it would be in vain to look to him for help. But, when he has raised up himself^f, and spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell^g, and been exalted on purpose that he might be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins^h, what may we not expect at his hands? Surely he is declared thereby to be the Son of God with powerⁱ, and to be able to save us to the uttermost^k. Let us only seek to know him in the power of his resurrection^l; and nothing shall be impossible unto us^m.]

3. The certainty of our own resurrection

[Our resurrection depended altogether upon his: if he had not risen, neither should we have risen: but because he rose, we shall rise also. Christ is the first-fruits, which, while it sanctified, assured also the whole harvestⁿ. He is our fore-runner, who is gone to heaven to prepare places for us, and will come again to raise us to the possession of them^o. We therefore may consider death and the grave as vanquished for us, and look forward to the complete triumph which we ourselves shall have over them in the last day^p. Because he liveth, we may be sure that we shall live also^q.]

As a further IMPROVEMENT of this passage, permit me to observe

1. How

^d 1 Cor. xv. 14, 17, 18.

^f John x. 17, 18.

^h Acts v. 31.

^k Heb. vii. 25.

^m Mark ix. 23.

^o Heb. vi. 20. John xiv. 2, 3.

^q John xiv. 19.

^e Rom. iv. 25. and viii. 34.

^g Col. ii. 15.

ⁱ Rom. i. 4.

^l Phil. iii. 10.

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^p 1 Cor. xv. 53—55.

1. How deeply are we interested in the writings of the Old Testament!

[In them are promises of which we receive the accomplishment. The word of God is not of private interpretation^r, as though it belonged only to this or that individual. Many parts doubtless had a *peculiar* reference to those to whom they were spoken; but none an *exclusive* reference. Let us then embrace the promises as spoken to ourselves^s, and expect the fulfilment of them to our own souls.]

2. What enemies are they to themselves who despise the ministry of the gospel!

[Many, when the gospel is preached to them, are ready to say like the devils, We beseech thee, torment us not^t. Yes, they look on faithful ministers as the troublers of Israel^u. But the scope of our ministry is to "*declare glad tidings*," even to proclaim a crucified, and an exalted Saviour. Let any one contemplate the foregoing subject, and see whether it do not afford matter for rejoicing. Let men only forsake their sins, and we have not a word to utter which will not administer to them an occasion of joy.]

3. What a near relation subsists between believers in all ages!

[They are our fathers, and we their children. We are all of one family, all united to one head^x, and all heirs of the same glory. Let us enjoy this thought, and look forward to the time when we shall sit down with all the patriarchs and prophets in the kingdom of our God^y.]

^r 2 Pet. i. 20. ^s Compare Josh. i. 5. with Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

^t Matt. viii. 29. and Luke viii. 28. ^u 1 Kings xviii. 17.

^x Eph. i. 10. Heb. xii. 23. ^y Matt. viii. 11. Luke xiii. 28.

CC. THE END OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

Ps. lxxviii. 18. *Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell among them.*

WHILE some give an unbounded scope to their fancies, and view Christ in almost every passage of the Scriptures, others run into a contrary extreme, and scarcely behold him even in the most express prophecies. But there certainly are many parts of the prophetic writings,

writings, and particularly of the Psalms, which, to whomsoever they relate in a literal sense, have a spiritual or mystical reference to Christ: nor can we err in interpreting them of him, while we take the inspired apostles for our guides.

David, having vanquished all his enemies, determined to provide a fixed residence for the ark of God, that God might dwell in the midst of his people at Jerusalem. And he penned this Psalm to be used on that occasion^a. But St. Paul informs us, that there was a further reference in it to the ascension of Christ; who being the true ark whereon the glory rested, went, after having triumphed over all his enemies, to his fixed abode in heaven; and, having received gifts as the fruits of his victories, gave them unto men, and provided that God should have a stated residence in his church^b.

With this inspired comment, we may proceed with confidence to consider

I. The manner of Christ's ascension

Christ, having submitted to the deepest humiliation, was now to receive a proportionable advancement, which, having already been begun in his resurrection, was now perfected in his ascension. This was

1. Glorious

[In verse 17, the glory of it is described, and it is compared with the descent of Jehovah on Mount Sinai. While he was in the very act of blessing his disciples^c, he was taken up by a cloud, as Elijah was in his fiery chariot, to heaven. Instantly myriads of the heavenly host surrounded him with their acclamations and hosannas. They had surveyed him with astonishment from the first moment that he came into the world. When he yet lay in the manger, they sang, Glory to God in the highest. But, when they beheld him agonizing in the garden, and expiring on the cross, we may almost conceive their songs of joy to have been turned into weeping and lamentation. We doubt not, however, but at this time their joy exceeded all that they had ever felt from their first creation.

^a It is thought that ver. 1—6. was sung when the ark was taken up by the Levites; ver. 7—14. while they were in their way to the hill, till they came in sight of it; ver. 15—17. while they were ascending it; and ver. 18—23. when the ark was deposited.

^b Eph. iv. 8.

^c Luke xxiv. 51.

creation. They now saw their Creator and their God, who had so long veiled himself in human flesh, ascending to his bright abodes, to display his glory in a light infinitely surpassing all that they had ever seen before. What must his redeemed people also have felt the very instant that he entered the portals of heaven? with what rapture and ecstasies must they have been filled! But our imagination cannot grasp the thought. We must be in heaven ourselves before we can form the smallest idea of their felicity. Suffice it then to say with the angelic messengers, that, as he ascended up into heaven, so will he speedily come again from heaven; and that in the meantime, instead of gazing with unprofitable curiosity, we must look for his blessings, and devote ourselves to his service ^d.]

2. Triumphant

[In his death he seemed vanquished; but in reality he overcame; and in his ascension he led captive all his enemies and ours. *Sin* had diffused its poison through all the descendants of Adam, and had infected all their powers both of body and soul. But Christ, having expiated its guilt, now rescued many vassals from its power. *Satan*, the god of this world, who had hitherto usurped dominion, and led men captive at his will, now "fell from heaven like lightning;" and his throne, shaken to its foundations, was demolished. *Death* also, that had reigned over all, now was vanquished in its turn; for Jesus "burst its bands:" "By death, he destroyed death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil:" and now, as a mighty conqueror, that had "spoiled principalities and powers, he triumphed over them openly," and led them captive at his chariot wheels.]

From contemplating the manner of his ascension, let us proceed to consider

II. The ends of it

There were some ends that respected Christ himself, namely, that he might receive his reward, and carry on his work within the veil: but we must confine ourselves to those which respect the church.

1. The immediate end

[As Jesus died, so he rose and ascended in a public capacity, as our mediator with God. He had purchased blessings for us; and he now went to receive them at his Father's

^d Acts i. 10, 11.

^e Heb. ii. 14.

^f Col. ii. 15.

Father's hands, that he might impart them to us. He was henceforth to have all fulness treasured up in himself, that we might receive out of it according to our necessities. He ascended, "that he might fill all things," and "impart repentance and remission of sins," together with all the gifts and graces of his Spirit, to his chosen people. That this was the immediate end of his ascension, appears not only from his own predictions respecting it^z, but from the express declaration of the apostles on the descent of the Holy Ghost^b. Yet it was not for those only who were waiting for redemption, but even "for the rebellious also," that he received gifts; as he abundantly testified in the conversion of his murderers; and as he is ready to testify in the conversion of us also.]

2. The remote end

[It was the privilege of the Jewish church to have the symbols of God's presence in their temple. But it is our privilege to have God himself both *with* us, and *in* us. He will make our hearts his habitation; he will dwell in us, and cause his glory to fill our souls. This was a further end of Christ's ascension, as he himself tells us: "I will pray the Father for you; and he will send you another comforter, that he may abide with you for everⁱ." Even the most rebellious heart, that has defied the Majesty of heaven, and despised hitherto all overtures of mercy, may yet be encouraged to look up to him; and the soul that has been filled with all iniquity may yet become the temple of the living God. Other conquerors, in the day of their triumph, have scattered largesses among their admiring followers; but this greatest of all gifts will Jesus bestow on his most inveterate enemies: let them only relent, and call upon his name, and he will give give them all the riches both of grace and glory.]

IMPROVEMENT

1. Let none despair of *mercy*

[We might have well supposed, that the ascension of Jesus would rather have been for the inflicting of judgments on his enemies: yet, behold, it was for the express purpose of exercising mercy. Let us not proudly deny that we are rebels; but, humbling ourselves before him as the chief of sinners, let us desire him to display the exceeding riches of his grace in his mercy towards us.]

2. Let none despair of *victory*

[Conflicts we must have, as long as we continue in the body; but in the very midst of them we may say, "Thanks
be

^z John xvi. 7.

^b Acts ii. 23.

ⁱ John xiv. 16, 17.

be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Does sin harass and defile us? Christ says, "It shall never have dominion over us." Does Satan seek to deceive or devour us? His head was bruised by Christ, and "he shall soon be bruised under our feet." Does death alarm us? Its sting is drawn; it is "swallowed up in victory;" it is among our richest treasures^k. Let us view Christ leading them all captive in his ascension; and know that, through him, we also shall be more than conquerors.]

^k 1 Cor. iii. 22.

CCI. THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST AN OCCASION FOR JOY.

Ps. xlvii. 5—7. *God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.*

IF we read the Psalms of David without any reference to Christ, we shall have a very imperfect view of their import: but if we consider them as containing many prophetic declarations, we shall find in them a rich mine of evangelical knowledge—The Psalm before us is supposed to have been written by David, when he carried up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to mount Sion^a; and to represent, by that typical event, the ascension of Christ to heaven: and, as that event was celebrated with all possible demonstrations of joy, so we are here exhorted to burst forth in joyful acclamations on account of the exaltation of Christ to his throne in glory—We shall consider

I. The event predicted

Christ is here spoken of in most exalted terms

[In many of the Psalms Christ is called by names confessedly belonging to the Deity, and never communicated to any creature—In the Epistle to the Hebrews that address of the Psalmist, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," is expressly applied to Christ^b—And, in the passage before us, the

^a 2 Sam. vi. 15.

^b Ps. xlv. 6. with Heb. i. 8.

the same adorable person is *thrice* called God, yea, JEHOVAH also, and “the King of all the earth”—We surely cannot but consider it as a strong confirmation of our faith, when we see this fundamental doctrine of our religion not confined to the apostolic writings, but pervading the scriptures which were given to the church a thousand years before Christ came into the world—]

His ascension also to heaven is described in glowing colours

[Christ is here considered as a mighty conqueror, triumphing over all his enemies, while he is surrounded by myriads of the heavenly host, and welcomed to the bright abodes which, for our sakes, he had condescended to leave—As the inhabitants of the invisible world are represented by the prophet as coming forth to insult the once terrible but now fallen king of Babylon^c, so we may conceive all the hosts of heaven stirring up each other to meet their once suffering, but now exalted Lord; and to congratulate him on the victories which he had gained over all the enemies of God and man — — — Like the women who came out of all the cities of Israel with musical instruments to celebrate David’s victory over Goliath^d, so doubtless the holy angels vied with each other on this occasion, striking their golden harps, and rending heaven itself with their acclamations and hosannas—]

The more we contemplate this glorious subject, the more readily shall we comply with

II. The exhortation grounded upon it

Every thing relating to Christ calls for our most ardent praise; but especially the event to which the text refers

[If we considered it in no other view than as a recompense to Christ, we ought surely to be glad; we should be thankful to God on his account; even though no benefit accrued from it to ourselves—But when we consider that they, over whom he has triumphed, were *our* enemies, that he has ascended, not as a private person, but as our forerunner, yea, as our head and representative, and that the royal authority, of which he is now possessed, is exercised for us, we ought to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable—It is that event which is the foundation of all our hopes, and which, even more than his death, affords us an assured expectation of final success^e—]

On this account we are exhorted to sing praise to God

[Who can hear these reiterated calls to praise God, and not feel it incumbent on him to engage in this sacred duty?—
We

^c Isai. xiv. 9—12, 16—20. ^d 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7. ^e Rom. viii. 34.

We should praise him *with frequency*: no less than five times in the short space of the text is the exhortation repeated: and does not this intimate that we should be continually joyful in our king? Should we not say with David, "Seven times a day will I praise thee?"—Nor is it in a dull and formal manner that we should perform this duty, but *with fervour*. Our whole hearts should be engaged in it: the praises of our God and Saviour should be, as it were, the natural language of our souls: praise should be the very element in which we live—Our constant acclamations should be, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name"—Nevertheless it is not a mere enthusiastic fervour that we should encourage, but a wise and temperate, an humble and holy devotion; we should praise him "*with understanding*:" for as a sacrifice, without fervour, is lame; so, without understanding, it is blind; and we must never offer the lame or blind for sacrifice [—]

APPLICATION

[What reason have we all to be ashamed that we are so backward to this holy exercise!—Though we know, in profession at least, how greatly we are interested in the ascension of Christ, how little have we rejoiced in it! Yea, even on the day appointed for the commemoration of it, how little are our hearts affected as they ought to be!—Let us chide our dull souls, and begin without delay this blessed work—Let us know assuredly, that, if we have no heart for this delightful employment, we are far from being fit for heaven, where this subject will be the theme of our contemplation and praise for evermore—If indeed we have begun to praise him, then let us abound more and more; for, the more we are engaged in singing the praises of our Redeemer here, the more we shall be prepared to join the general chorus of the saints above—]

f Mal. i. 8.

CCII. CHRIST VICTORIOUS OVER ALL HIS ENEMIES.

Isai. xlv. 23—25. *I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

TO those who know the infinite importance of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, it is delightful to see the
the

the irresistible evidence of it in the Old Testament as well as in the New—Who is it that in the two preceding verses says, “I am the LORD, I am God, a just God and a Saviour; there is no God else beside me, there is none beside me, there is none else?” Is this a creature? Who is this that, in the text, presumes to swear by *himself*; that arrogates to himself universal dominion; and that so frequently appropriates to himself the incommunicable name, JEHOVAH? Is this a creature? Who is it that can fulfil the promises here made to his friends, or execute the judgments here denounced against his enemies? Is he a mere creature?—No person that is not blinded by prejudice, or warped by controversy, can doubt one moment, but that it is the supreme God, who is speaking throughout the whole passage: yet this very passage does St. Paul expressly apply to Christ, affirming that it was a prediction of his final victory, and of the appearance of the whole human race at his tribunal^a.

For the further elucidation of these solemn words we shall consider

I. The subject-matter of the oath

To comprehend this aright, we should *notice particularly* those very opposite circumstances which were appointed to take place, before the predictions in the text were to receive their accomplishment. Christ was to be insulted by his whole nation; and his claims of Messiahship were to be made the subject of profane ridicule: he was not only to be rejected, but to be crucified as a malefactor, and to die as one unable to save himself: his enemies were to enjoy a momentary triumph; and his followers to be disappointed, dejected, and confounded. But, that these things should not be a stumbling-block to any, it was here foretold that all these circumstances should be speedily reversed. In this view, the oath relates to four things

1. The exaltation of Christ

[Christ, as King of kings, and Lord of lords, had a right to universal empire: every creature was bound to render him an

^a Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

an unlimited and unreserved obedience. But it was foreseen that, instead of submitting to him, his creatures would rise up in rebellion against him, and cry out with one voice, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Christ, however, laughed them to scorn; and told them by his prophet, many hundred years before, that every knee should bow to him, and every tongue take an oath of allegiance to him as the only sovereign of the universe; at least, if they did not do this willingly, as an expression of their unfeigned subjection, they should do it, in effect, against their will, by suffering the punishment due to their rebellion.]

2. The advancement of his kingdom

[While in the world, he was to be considered as vile, yea, as the vilest of mankind; and to appear weak as other men: but in due time he was to be regarded, not only as righteous and powerful, but as the only source of righteousness and strength to all his creatures. In themselves, all are "ungodly and without strength:" feeling therefore their guilt and helplessness they are to "come to him," each saying for himself, and each animating others to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."]

3. The confusion of his enemies

[Notwithstanding his unspotted innocence, and unbounded kindness, he was to be an object of utter abhorrence to his whole nation. But their triumph over him was to be of short duration: the time was soon to come, when they should "see him whom they had pierced, and mourn." Their violence was soon to be recompensed upon their own heads, unless by previous repentance and faith in his blood, they obtained the remission of their sins. At all events, they should be "ashamed," whether penitent and pardoned, or impenitent and condemned. They should either be made to acknowledge with Paul, that they had been "blasphemers, injurious, persecutors, and the very chief of sinners," or to confess the justice of that sentence, that consigned them over to everlasting misery.]

4. The salvation of his people

[His enemies are the seed of profane Esau; but his friends are "the seed of Israel," whose prayers prevailed with God, and whose example they imitate. These were for a time to be as men disappointed of their hopes; but, ere long, their expectations, founded on the word of Christ, were to be abundantly "justified" in the sight of men; and their persons too were to be "justified" in the sight of God; so that both before God and man they should have reason to glory in the name of Jesus. None of them should be left in their forlorn condition;
but

but "all," all without exception, be made to triumph in him as the Rock of their salvation.]

Such was the exaltation, and such the consequences of it to himself, to his enemies, and to his believing people, which Christ so long before predicted with a solemn oath; in confirmation of which we proceed to state

II. The certainty of its accomplishment

If God had simply asserted these things, it could not fail but that they must come to pass; for, "he is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent." But for our fuller conviction and assurance, he has sworn; and "because he could swear by no greater, he has sworn by himself:" his word is gone forth in righteousness and truth, nor shall it "return," till every jot or tittle of it be fulfilled. But

1. It has already been accomplished in part

[At the hour of his death, his enemies thought that they had gained their end. He, whom they had arrayed in mock majesty, and crowned with a chaplet of thorns, and before whom they had bowed the knee in derision, crying, Hail, King of the Jews, had expired on the accursed tree, an object of universal execration and abhorrence: and his followers were scattered as sheep that have no shepherd. The leader being destroyed, it seemed as if this infant sect, like others that had preceded it, were crushed, and brought to nought. It only remained that Jesus should be proved an impostor, by watching his tomb for three days; and then their victory would be complete. But in vain were the stone, the seal, the watch: at the appointed hour he rose triumphant; and the affrighted guards fled to relate the wonderful event. Now began his exaltation, which speedily reversed the scenes that had been exhibited. His enemies already stood confounded; and propagated an absurd falsehood to conceal their shame. The hopes of his disconsolate people were revived by many infallible proofs of his resurrection. They conversed and eat with him, and beheld him in the very act of ascending into heaven. It was but a few days afterwards, when, according to his promise, he sent down the Holy Ghost; and thereby completed the confusion of his enemies, and the triumph of his friends. Instantly no less than three thousand of his most inveterate enemies "bowed the knee to him," and "took, as it were, an oath" of allegiance to him as their rightful sovereign: though they had just before seen him "crucified through weakness," and treated as the most infamous of malefactors, they "came to him" that they might obtain "righteousness and strength." What confusion

now seized the rulers, who still retained their enmity against him! All their efforts were in vain: the more fierce their opposition was, the more did the word prevail: so that in a little time, not Jerusalem only, but all Judea, yea, the whole Roman empire, was filled with converts to the cause of Christ. Now the disciples triumphed in their turn: and from that time myriads in every place have been "justified by his blood," and have "gloried" in his salvation.]

2. It shall be yet more fully accomplished at the day of judgment

[It is in reference to this period in particular that the apostle cites the passage before us^b: and then indeed will it be verified to the uttermost. The submission of his people will be more entire, their acknowledgments more grateful, and their glorying more ecstatic, than they could be in this world; while the subjugation of his enemies, and their confusion before him, will be complete. When he shall say, as to those of old, Many good works did I for you, for which of them did ye hate me? for you I left my glory, and veiled myself in human flesh; for you I sojourned upon earth, and died upon the cross; for you I sent my messengers to beseech you in my name to accept of mercy: for which of these things was I a stumbling-block unto you? how will they hang down their heads with shame! Eloquent as they now are in vindication of themselves, they will not *then* have one word to answer. Thus shall it be both to the friends and enemies of Christ: as sure as there is a God in heaven, possessed of faithfulness and power to fulfil his word, so sure shall not one jot or tittle of it ever fail of its accomplishment.]

IMPROVEMENT

1. For conviction

[Nothing surely can be more calculated to awaken the secure than this solemn oath of Jehovah. Methinks the Deity, to fix our attention and obtain belief, stands forth before the assembled universe, and, with his hand lifted up to heaven, swears, "As sure as I am God, thus and thus shall it be with my friends and with my enemies." Must not then sinners be more deaf than adders, and more obdurate than rocks, if they do not hear, and relent, at the voice of their God? O that men would no longer trifle with their eternal interests! We may argue as we please against the word of God; but we cannot invalidate its tremendous declarations. Let us then believe and tremble, yea, "believe, and obey the gospel."]

2. For

^b Rom. xiv. 11.

^c Alluding to Dan. xii. 7.

2. For consolation

[God, in his oath, consults more immediately the comfort of his people^d. They are, alas! too backward to believe his word; and therefore he confirms it with an oath. Let every subject then of the Redeemer's kingdom rejoice: let their confidence in him both for righteousness and strength be greatly increased: let them never doubt, but that his enemies and their enemies, shall soon become his footstool: let them know, that they are justified from all their sins: and let them glory in him as their God and portion. Difficulties they may, they must expect; but the word of God shall not be frustrated: "the counsel of the Lord shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure." Let them only rest on the oath of God, and they shall experience its accomplishment to all eternity.

^d Heb. vi. 17, 18.

CCIII. CHRIST'S COMING TO JUDGMENT.

Jude 14, 15. *Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*

GOD has had in every age some to testify against the ungodly, and to warn them of the consequences of their sin at the future judgment: and though the faithful execution of this office meets with but ill returns from an ungrateful world, yet we trust there will be found, to the end of time, some, who will gladly suffer reproach or even death itself in the service of their God, and in the benevolent attempt to save their fellow-sinners from destruction—We do not indeed hear of many, who were witnesses for God, before the time of Moses; and even his warnings and exhortations were enforced principally with *temporal* sanctions: yet the certainty of a future judgment was known not only by Moses, but by the antediluvian world; and was solemnly urged by Enoch as a motive to repentance—This prophecy is not recorded in the Old Testament; but, by whatever means St. Jude attained the knowledge of it, whether by tradition, or by some written memorial, or by immediate inspiration, we may be sure that it was delivered

delivered by Enoch; and we may be thankful that such a precious fragment of inspired truth has been preserved to us—It proclaims to us

I. The manner in which our Lord shall come to judgment

Christ, we are assured, is coming to judge the world

[There can be no reason to doubt that Enoch referred to Christ, even to that very “seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent’s head:” him he represents as coming to complete his victory over Satan and his agents by calling them to his tribunal, and by consigning them over to the punishment they have deserved—The New Testament writers uniformly speak to the same effect: they declare that it is at the judgment seat of CHRIST we must stand^a; that it is Christ who is ordained to be the judge of quick and dead^b; and, that all judgment is *therefore* committed unto him, *because* he is the Son of man^c; or in other words, that he, who died for sinners, shall, in that very nature that he assumed for them, be the immediate author of salvation to his followers and of condemnation to his enemies—]

And even the manner of his appearing is here plainly predicted

[It is not with “his *saints*,” but with his *holy ones*, or holy angels, that he will come—The saints will not be his assessors in judgment till they themselves shall have received their sentence: *then* indeed “they shall judge angels^d,” but till then, they themselves will stand before him to be judged. But the holy angels will be his attendants in the clouds of heaven; all the “myriads” of them shall descend with him from their blessed abodes, to increase the solemnity of that day, and to honour him, to whom they owe their very existence—This accords with the description given by Daniel^e, by St. Paul^f, and by Christ himself^g—How different will our Lord’s appearance then be from what it was when he first visited our guilty world, and lay an helpless infant in the manger!—And how earnestly should we now exert ourselves that we may be prepared to meet him!—]

That our minds may be raised to an expectation of that day, let us consider

II. The

^a 2 Cor. v. 10.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 3.

^b Acts x. 42.

^e Dan. vii. 9, 10.

^g Matt. xxv. 31.

^c John v. 27.

^f 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

II. The ends of his coming

It is not to display his own glory that Christ will come; but

1. To pass judgment upon the whole world

[All, who have ever lived in this wretched world, shall be summoned before him—The old and the young, the rich and the poor, will all come forth out of their graves^h, and those that shall be then living upon earth shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and all shall stand together at his tribunalⁱ—Every one shall then be tried as by fire^k; their actions shall then be weighed as in a balance; and the most secret motions of their hearts be brought to light^l—Then shall they that are approved, “have praise of God;” and they that are disapproved, be driven from his presence—Nor will Jesus merely pronounce the sentence of condemnation or acquittal, but he will “*execute*” it himself, either exalting them instantly to thrones of glory, or casting them headlong into “the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone”—]

2. To manifest the equity of his decisions

[Whatever endeavours be now used to shew men their guilt and danger, they have many things to allege in their own favour^m; nor even “if we could speak with the tongues of angels,” could we bring home conviction to their hearts—But Jesus will shew them, beyond all contradiction, the futility of their excuses: and will prove by such unquestionable evidence “the deeds they have committed, the words they have spoken,” and the thoughts they have entertained, that they shall be silenced and confounded before him—The ministers, who once laboured for their salvation, shall then be forced to bear testimony against them: their companions in sin, though to their own confusion, must also testify of those deeds of darkness, which they once fondly hoped would be buried in eternal oblivion—The very places, where their most secret iniquities were committed, should rather stand forth to accuse them, than that they should escape with impunityⁿ—Above all, “God himself will be a swift witness against them^o,” and will so thoroughly “convince” them of all their sins, whether of commission or of omission, that they shall be constrained to acknowledge the equity of that sentence, which dooms them to everlasting burnings—Even in hell, will they be compelled to say,

^h Rev. xx. 12, 13.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 13.

ⁱ Rom. ii. 16.

^m They will impute their negligence to their situation in life, to necessity, or to any thing rather than the true cause, their own utter aversion to God and holiness.

ⁿ Hab. ii. 11.

^o Mal. iii. 5.

say, " Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments ^p"—]

INFER

1. How needful is it that we should instantly begin our preparation for that day !

[Five thousand years ago the prophet spake of Jesus as so near at hand, that it seemed as if he were already come ^q—And it is in this way that all, whether prophets or apostles, have been inspired to speak—So strongly did St. Paul express himself on this subject that the Thessalonians conceived the judgment-day to be almost immediately at hand ^r—In the same manner must we say, " The Lord is at hand ; " " the Judge is at the door "—He surely is coming as soon as ever the events that are ordained to precede his advent shall have received their accomplishment—And with respect to us, it signifies little whether it be near or distant, since as death leaves us, judgment will find us—Is it not even madness then to delay our repentance, since we cannot tell but that death may come within the next year, or day, or hour?—Beloved, shall your Lord come, and find you sleeping ? Is he hastening towards you, and will you not prepare to meet him ? O awake from your slumbers, and turn to him with your whole hearts ; that so you may " have confidence before him at his coming"—]

2. How desirable is it to possess an interest in Christ !

[It surely is not necessary to prove that we are ungodly, since we have all sinned, times without number, in thought, word, and deed, against the Divine Majesty—Whither then shall we go for the remission of our sins ? How shall we get our iniquities blotted out from the book of his remembrance ! Our tears, even if we could shed rivers of tears, will never avail for this end : nothing but the blood of Jesus can ever cleanse us from the guilt of one sin : and, if we be not washed in that fountain, we shall die in our iniquities, and lie under the guilt of them for ever—Let us then seek an interest in Christ—Let us never attempt to substitute any repentance or reformation of our own, in the place of his meritorious blood and righteousness : but let it be our one desire to " be found in him," and to obtain from him those garments of salvation, which alone can " cover the nakedness " of our guilty souls ^t—]

3. With

^p Rev. xvi. 7.

^r 2 Thess. ii. 2.

^t Rev. iii. 18.

^q ἤλθε.

^s Phil. iv. 5. Jam. v. 9.

3. With what confidence and comfort may believers look forward to the coming of their Lord !

[Whom will they have for their judge but the very person who bought them with his blood ? the very person in whom they have believed ; and to whom they cleaved with full purpose of heart ?—Be it so then ; the catalogue of their sins shall be produced, a catalogue reaching, as it were, from heaven to earth ; and they shall not have one word to offer in arrest of judgment : yet, will the Saviour pass a sentence of condemnation upon them ? Will he not himself stand forth and testify, “ I saw their deep contrition ; I treasured up their tears in my vial ; I was witness to their frequent sighs and groans, and to their cries for mercy through my atoning blood : ” “ Deliver them from going down into the pit ; I paid their ransom : ” they were mine ; and they manifested that they were mine^u, by their obedience to my will, and their conformity to my image : Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit my kingdom prepared for you ? ”—Fear not then, ye weak and trembling saints ; but rather “ be looking for and hasting to the coming of the day of Christ^x : ” ye shall surely stand before him with joy ; while they, who once justified their ungodliness, and thought, that to be among *the godly* was a fit matter for derision, shall bewail their folly, and confess the equity of the sentence that fixes *you* in heaven, and *themselves* in hell—Remember then with gratitude that you are to have Jesus for your judge ; and when he says, “ Behold, I come quickly, ” let your hearts reply, “ Even so, come Lord Jesus^y ”—]

^u God represents himself in this very light. Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

^x 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^y Rev. xxii. 20.

CCIV. CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

Heb. ix. 27, 28. *As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.*

IT is probable that many in the first ages of Christianity wondered, as indeed many even at this time do, how persons should be saved by the death of Christ, thousands of years before he came into the world ; more especially since the most solemn sacrifices under the Jewish œconomy were of no effect beyond the year in which they were offered. But the Jewish sacrifices
needed

needed to be repeated, because they were worthless and inefficient: whereas the perfection of Christ's sacrifice gave it a retrospective and prospective efficacy, so that, at whatever period of the world it should be offered, it needed never to be repeated. This is the scope of the passage before us; and the apostle illustrates his argument by an awful and acknowledged truth. To comprehend the force of his observations, we must consider

I. Man's destination to death and judgment

Every man must die

[This is too obvious to need a proof. Whatever be our age, condition, pursuits, and prospects, we must *die*. If our life were protracted to the age of Methuselah, we must die at last: God has "appointed" it; nor shall his decree be either defeated or reversed. But it is only "once" that we can die. Though some few who have been miraculously restored to life, have died a second time, we must not expect to return from our graves. If the great work of salvation be not completed before we die, we shall be undone for ever^a.]

After death we shall all be judged

[God has appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his works. And this also shall be but "once:" for, though every man's state is fixed as soon as he goes into the invisible world, it is not till the general resurrection that his body shall participate the portion assigned to his soul. And, as there is *no return from death* to another state of probation, so there is *no appeal from the sentence that shall be passed* in that day.]

The apostle having mentioned this, proceeds to state

II. A similar appointment respecting Christ

Christ "once" died for the sins of men

[Though in appearance our Saviour died like other men, yet in reality his death was altogether different from theirs. He died as a sacrifice for sin: his death was that very atonement which had been typically represented from the beginning of the world. But though he was to be "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world," he died only "once." The legal sacrifices were constantly repeated, because they were rather "remembrances of sins" than a real expiation of them: but "he, by one offering of himself, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified^b;" and "many," even all that

^a Eccl. ix. 10.

^b Heb. x. 14.

that believe in him, have their sins removed for ever by virtue of it.]

He also will “appear a second time” at the day of judgment

[At his first coming he appeared “in the likeness of sinful flesh^c,” and was treated as a sinner both by God and man: but at his second coming he will assume a very different appearance. As the high priest, while offering the annual sacrifices, was clothed only in plain linen garments, but, when he had completed his sacrifice, came forth in his splendid robes to bless the people^d; so our great high priest will put off the garb of humiliation, and shine forth in all his majesty and glory^e. At his first coming, he saved not himself; but, at that day, he will impart “salvation” unto others, even to all who seek him in sincerity and truth.]

The apostle having introduced God's appointment respecting man to illustrate that respecting Christ, we shall point out

III. The correspondence and connexion between them

The mention of death and judgment as appointed unto man was not at all necessary to the apostle's argument: but, *as an illustration of it*, it was very pertinent

1. Death and judgment are the consequents of *sin*; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be the means of *salvation*

[If there had been no sin, there would have been no death, nor any occasion for a day of judgment: and, if Christ had not come to bear the sins of men, there would have been no salvation: all must have inevitably and eternally perished. Moreover, as the law required that the high priest, after having finished his work within the vail, should come forth to bless the people; so in the divine appointment, Christ's second coming is necessary to the complete salvation of his followers.]

2. Death and judgment shall be *fatal to unbelievers*; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be *means of salvation to them that believe*

[The Lord Jesus, as a judge, will condemn the wicked; “he will come to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not his gospel.” But as a priest, he will

^c Rom. viii. 3.

^d Lev. xvi. 23, 24. with viii. 7, 9, and Numb. vi. 23, 24.

^e Matt. xxv. 31.

will come forth only to bless his redeemed, who are praying without, whilst he is interceding for them within the vail^f. They are fitly represented as "looking for him;" and he will appear to their unutterable and eternal joy.]

ADDRESS

1. To those who are regardless of their spiritual welfare

[O that you would duly consider the certainty and nearness of death and judgment! You would then soon turn from vanity and sin, and labour to secure an interest in Christ. Let this subject then dwell upon your minds, till you are quickened by it to seek the Lord, and have obtained through him the remission of your sins.]

2. To those who are anxious to save their souls

[If you really look to Christ to take away your sins, you need not be afraid of death and judgment. You may look forward to Christ's second coming, not with comfort only, but unspeakable delight. Stand then in this posture, looking for and hasting to that blessed day^g; if he tarry, wait for him; and in due time you shall hear from his lips that reviving sentence; "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."]

^f Luke i. 9, 10.

^g 2 Pet. iii. 12.

CCV. THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

Rev. xx. 11—15. *I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire.*

WE are not to imagine that the mysterious parts of scripture are unworthy of our most attentive perusal: for though we should not succeed in our endeavours to comprehend all that is contained in them, we shall find much that is plain, intelligible, and important. The chapter before

before us speaks of a resurrection of all the martyred saints to reign with Christ on earth a thousand years : it informs us also that, at the expiration of that period, Satan shall be loosed from his confinement, and prevail against them, deceiving many, and destroying many. It tells us moreover, that God, determining to execute vengeance on that deceiver of the nations, and on such ministers as have been his instruments, and upon all those who have been deceived by them, will then come to judge the world in righteousness.

We apprehend this reign of Christ on earth to be merely figurative : but, without dwelling on the points that are of difficult interpretation, we may reap much instruction from considering the description here given us of the day of judgment : in which we may notice

I. The appearance of the Judge

[Christ is the person who shall judge the world ^a: and he is here, as elsewhere on the very same occasion ^b, declared to be “ God,” as well as man, Emmanuel, God with us. His being seated on a “ throne” denotes, that his decisions, sanctioned as they are by the authority of the King of kings, will be final and irreversible. Nor is it without design that the throne is described as “ white,” seeing that it will exceed the meridian sun in brightness, nor ever be sullied by the smallest instance of partiality or error.

The idea of “ earth and the heavens that surround it, fleeing from before his face, and no place being found for them,” is calculated to impress our minds with the most awful sense of his majesty and glory. This guilty globe was once the place of his residence, till its impious inhabitants rose up against him with one consent, and put him to death. But in that day, as though it was conscious of its own desert, it will flee from his presence ; nor will any place be found for this theatre of sin to exist any longer in its present polluted state ^c.]

II. The persons that shall be judged

[Not only at the deluge, when the whole world was drowned, but since that time, millions, who, for mercantile or hostile purposes, have traversed the mighty waters, have found their graves in the bosom of the ocean. But at the last day,
“ the

^a Acts xvii. 31. John v. 22.

^b Rom. xiv. 10—12.

^c 2 Pet. iii. 10.

“the sea shall give them up;” “death” also shall surrender up the bodies that have long since mouldered into dust, and “hades,” or the invisible world, shall deliver up the souls that have long abode in happiness or misery. All who have ever lived upon the earth, whether “small or great, shall stand before the tribunal of their God.” The God that formed them out of nothing will collect with ease their scattered atoms, and reunite them to their kindred souls. Every one shall appear in his own proper body, nor shall he be able either to withstand the summons, or elude the search. The king and the beggar, the sage philosopher and the child that died ere it saw the light, shall be no otherwise distinguished, than as they are classed with the righteous or the wicked.]

III. The rule of judgment

[Various “books shall then be opened” to serve as grounds of the divine procedure^d. *The book of God’s law*, originally inscribed on the hearts of our first parents, and still not wholly effaced even from the minds of heathens, will be the rule by which they shall be judged, who never saw the light of revelation^e. *The book of the gospel*, wherein the mysteries of redemption are unfolded to our view, will be the touchstone by which *our* faith and practice shall be tried. *The book of conscience* too, which now omits many things, or grossly misrepresents them, will then give a fairer testimony to our conduct: for then it will be a perfect transcript of another book that shall be opened, namely, *the book of God’s remembrance*. In *this*, every action, word, and thought, was faithfully recorded by the unerring hand of God himself: and every purpose, desire or motive, shall have an influence on his decision to enhance our happiness or augment our misery^f.

There is yet another book, particularly specified in the text, “*the book of life*.” This is none other than the book of God’s decrees, wherein were written from the foundation of the world the names of his elect. And as the other books will be opened in order to vindicate the equity of his decisions, so will *this*, in order to display the sovereignty of his grace. *Twice* is this book mentioned in the text; but *twice* also is it declared, that all “shall be judged *according to their works*.” while therefore we honour God’s electing love, we must carefully dismiss every thought that may disparage his remunerative justice.]

IV. The sentence that shall be executed

[Nothing is expressly mentioned in the text respecting the sentence of the righteous; though it is evidently implied, that they, having their names written in the book of life,

^d Dan. vii. 9, 10.

^e Rom. ii. 14, 15.

^f 1 Cor. iv. 5.

life, shall have a very different end from that of the ungodly. Yes; to them there is no condemnation; they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life^g. If indeed God should judge them by the strict tenor of his law, they must perish: but he views them as clothed in the Redeemer's righteousness; and accepts, *for his sake*, not their persons only, but their services, treasuring up their tears in his vial, and noticing their very desires in order to a future recompense^h.

As for those whose names are not written in the book of life, their state will be inexpressibly awful. They, together with "death and hell," the present receptacles of the damned, shall be "cast into the lake of fire;" in order that, except in that place, there may not remain any vestige of sin or misery in the whole creation. This is emphatically called "the second death;" because the pangs of dissolution and the consequent separation of soul and body, are no more than a faint emblem of the torments that shall be endured in that state of separation from God.

Nor will these have reason to complain that their names were not written in the book of life, since they never desired to be there registered, nor regarded the Lamb of God, who only could inscribe their names therein.]

INFER

1. How needful is it to secure an interest in Christ!

[We all are hastening to his judgment-seat; nor will any thing avail us there but an interest in his blood and righteousness. By the law we are all condemned; but by the gospel we may all have life. Let us then not waste all our time in seeking the things that perish with the using; but rather secure an inheritance that shall never fade, and that shall continue when all earthly things shall be dissolved.]

2. How carefully should the professors of religion take heed to their ways!

[All must be judged according to their works, the quantity of which as well as the quality, will make an essential difference in our stateⁱ. Every hour, as it passes, wings its way to heaven, and records the manner in which it was spent. Let us then frequently ask ourselves, what the last hour has recorded respecting us, and whether we shall be glad to see the transactions of it brought forth as evidences at the bar of judgment? God help us to bear this in mind; and so to pass our few remaining hours, as we shall wish we had passed them, when we stand naked before his tribunal!]

^g Rom. viii. 1. John x. 27, 28.

^h Mal. iii. 16, 17.

ⁱ Gal. vi. 8. 2 Cor. ix. 6.

CCVI. THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

Zech. ix. 17. *How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!*

THE glory of Christ is manifested throughout all the holy scriptures—

This is attested both by the apostles and by our Lord himself—

In the New Testament he shines like the sun in an unclouded atmosphere—

In the Old, though generally veiled, he often bursts forth as from behind a cloud with astonishing beauty and splendour—

Such a view of him is exhibited in the chapter now before us—

Nor could the Prophet himself forbear exclaiming with wonder and admiration, “How great is his goodness!” &c.

We cannot have our minds more delightfully occupied than in contemplating

I. The goodness of our Lord

In the context he is set forth as the God of providence and of grace—

And in order to behold his goodness we must view him in both respects

1. As the God of providence

[As all things were created, so are they upheld and governed by him—

To him we owe the preservation of our corporeal and intellectual powers—

We are continually fed by his bounty, and protected by his arm—

The meanest creature in the universe has abundant reason to adore him—

His

^a Acts x. 43. Luke xxiv. 27. John v. 39.

^b After foretelling the preservation of the Jews amidst the destruction of surrounding nations, the prophet called their attention to Christ, as their lowly but triumphant king (ver. 9.) who should redeem them by his blood (ver. 11.) be a strong hold to all who should turn unto him (ver. 12.) and save them with an everlasting salvation (ver. 16).

His own people in particular may discern unnumbered instances of his goodness in his dispensations towards them—

His most afflictive as well as his more pleasing dispensations afford them much occasion for gratitude and thanksgiving^c—]

2. As a God of grace

[Jesus is the one fountain of spiritual blessings to his church^d—

Neither prophets nor apostles had any grace but from him^e—

To him must we ascribe every good disposition that is in our hearts^f—

What reason then have his faithful followers to bless his name!—

How thankful should they be that he called *them* by his grace!—

That he so distinguished them, not only from the fallen angels, but from multitudes of the human race!—

With what gratitude should they acknowledge his continued kindness!—

Though they have often turned back from him, he has not cast them off—

Yea rather, he has “healed their backslidings and loved them freely”—

Surely, every blessing they receive, and every victory they gain, should fill them with admiring thoughts of his goodness^g—

Let every soul then comply with that injunction of the Psalmist^h—

And, like him, repeat the wish, which a sense of his mercies must inspireⁱ—]

If we have just conceptions of his goodness we shall be more able to behold

II. His beauty

The world behold “no beauty nor comeliness” in the face of Jesus—

But the saints of “old saw his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father”—

This we also may see, if we survey him—

1. In his divine character

[“We cannot by searching find out the Almighty to perfection”—

Little

^c Ps. cxix. 75.

^d Eph. i. 22.

^e John i. 16.

^f Phil. ii. 13. Heb. xii. 2.

^g 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^h Ps. cxlv. 7.

ⁱ Ps. cvii. 8, 15, 21, 31.

Little do we know of the greatness of his *majesty*, or the thunder of his *power*^k—

We cannot comprehend his unsearchable *wisdom*, his unspotted *holiness*, his inviolable *truth* and *faithfulness*—

We can scarcely form any idea of the inflexibility of his *justice*, the extent of his *mercy*, or the heights and depths of his *love*^l—

We know that Jesus is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person^m—

But, when we attempt to delineate that image, we only “darken counsel by words without knowledgeⁿ”—

His glory is more than the feeble language of mortality can express—]

2. In his human character

[Here we look at him, as the Jews at Moses when his face was veiled—

And can contemplate him more easily, because he shines with a less radiant lustre—

Doubtless while he lay in the manger the virtues of his mind beamed forth in his countenance—

Nor is it to be wondered at that the Jewish doctors were so filled with admiration at him while he was yet a child^o—

But principally must we view him during the course of his ministry—

What marvellous *compassion* did he manifest to the souls and bodies of *men*[!]—

Not one applied to him for bodily or spiritual health without obtaining his request—

And when many were hardened in their sins he wept over them^p—

Yea, he even pleaded the cause of those who mocked and reviled him on the cross^q—

His *zeal for God* was ardent and unremitted—

It was “his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father”—

Nor could any thing for one moment divert or deter him from the prosecution of his work—

His *meekness*, *patience*, *fortitude*, were altogether invincible—

Whatever was amiable and excellent in man abounded in him^r—

He was not merely virtuous, but virtue itself incarnate—

Nor,

^k Job xxvi. 14.

^l Eph. iii. 19.

^m Heb. i. 3.

ⁿ Job xxxviii. 2.

^o Luke ii. 46, 47.

^p Luke xix. 41.

^q Luke xxiii. 34.

^r Ps. xlv. 2.

Nor, though continually tried in the hottest furnace, was there found in him the smallest imperfection or alloy^s—]

3. In his mediatorial character

[With what readiness did he become a surety for sinful man^t!—

What astonishing condescension did he manifest in uniting himself to our nature!—

How cheerfully did he go forth to meet the sufferings that were appointed for him—

In the garden and on the cross, when to the eye of sense “his visage was marred more than any man’s,” his beauty was most conspicuous to the eye of faith—

His obedience unto death was the fruit of his love, and the price of our redemption—

How beautiful is he *now* in the eyes of those who behold his glory!—

And how will he “be admired and glorified by all” in the last day!—

Satan must have blinded us indeed if we be yet insensible to his charms^u—

If we be true believers, he cannot but be precious to our souls^x—]

APPLICATION

1. To those who have never yet beheld the goodness and beauty of the Lord

[We speak not *now* to those who seek his face, and long to enjoy him—

For though their sorrow endure for a night, joy will come to them in the morning—

But they, who pant not after him, are miserably ignorant of his excellency—

Their views of Christ are different from those of the most competent judges^y—

And different from what they will shortly be in the eternal world—

Let such persons diligently consider the Saviour’s character—

And cry to God for that spirit whose office it is to reveal Christ unto us—

Then

^s John xiv. 30. ^t Ps. xl. 7, 8. ^u 2 Cor. iv. 4. ^x 1 Pet. ii. 7.

^y To the Father he is “chosen and precious,” 1 Pet. ii. 4.; to the angels, the subject of their praise, Rev. v. 11, 12; to saints of old, an object of great desire, Hag. ii. 7. John viii. 56.; to all pious men at this time, their supreme good, Phil. iii. 7, 8.

Then shall they both see the King in his beauty, and be changed into his image^z—]

2. To those whose eyes have been opened to behold him

[Let your meditations of him be more sweet and frequent—

However much you know of him, there are unsearchable depths unfathomed—

Let your determination therefore accord with that of David^a—

View him as appointing your trials, and dispensing your mercies—

Consider him as the fountain from whence you are to have supplies of grace—

Look to him as the example which you are continually to follow—

Above all, rely on him as expiating your guilt, and interceding for you—

Thus will you glory in him as your “friend and your beloved”—

And at last will see him as he is, and be like him for ever—]

^z Isai. xxxiii. 17. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^a Ps. xxvii. 4.

CCVII. THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. lii. 7. *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!*

IN order to understand the prophetic writings, we must always bear in mind that they have a spiritual or mystical sense, as well as a plain and literal one—The words before us, in their primary meaning, evidently refer to the joy, with which the proclamation of Cyrus, when he permitted the captive Jews to return from Babylon to their native country, would be received—But they certainly relate also to the deliverance announced to us under the gospel dispensation; for it is in this view that they are quoted by the apostle Paul^a—We shall take occasion from them to shew

I. What

^a Rom. x. 15.

I. What the gospel is

It is described with sufficient accuracy in the text : it is

1. A proclamation of " peace and salvation " to man

[The gospel supposes men to have offended God, and to be obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure—It further supposes that they have no way of conciliating the divine favour, or of warding off the stroke of his indignation—Coming to men in this helpless and hopeless state, it publisheth tidings of peace and salvation : it represents sin as expiated by the atoning blood of Jesus ; and God as reconciled to all who will trust in his meritorious and all-prevailing sacrifice—This is the view which St. Paul himself gives us of the gospel ; in preaching of which gospel ministers resemble the messengers sent to Babylon, who had nothing to do but to proclaim a full and free deliverance to the wretched captives^b—]

2. A declaration of Christ's power and grace

[The Chaldeans, who so grievously oppressed their Jewish captives, may justly represent to us the bitter and tyrannical dominion of sin and Satan : and Cyrus, who, without fee or reward, liberated them from their bondage, may be considered as the agent and representative of the Deity—As therefore the messengers would not fail to remind the Jews that Cyrus, the one author of their happiness, would continue to them his protection and favour while they maintained their allegiance to him ; so, in preaching the gospel, we are to declare, that Christ, to whom we owe the beginnings of our liberty, will complete our deliverance, and continue to us all the tokens of his love, provided we yield him, as we are in duty bound, a willing and unreserved obedience—Thus did Christ himself preach the gospel, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand^c—]

If we view the gospel in this light, we shall see immediately

II. That it is a ground of joy

By a beautiful figure, the very steps of the messenger hastening over the distant mountains are represented as inspiring us with joy. That the gospel itself is a source of joy, appears in that

1. It has been considered so from the first moment of its promulgation

[Abraham, two thousand years before its promulgation, rejoiced

^b 2 Cor. v. 18—20. ^c Comp. Mark i. 14, 15. with Matt. iv. 17.

rejoiced exceedingly in that distant prospect of it ^d—At the birth of Jesus, our deliverer, an host of angels congratulated the world, saying, Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord ^e—As soon as ever the full effects of the gospel came to be experienced, the converts, filled with every malignant temper just before, were filled with joy, and eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God ^f—No sooner was the gospel preached in Samaria, than there was great joy in that city: and, the instant that the eunuch had embraced it, he went on his way rejoicing ^g—Thus it is at this day an healing balm and a reviving cordial to all who understand and receive it—]

2. It is in itself well calculated to create joy in our hearts

[Let but its blessings be felt, and it will be impossible not to rejoice—Did the Jews exult at a deliverance from a cruel yoke, and a restoration to their native country? How much more must a sinner rejoice at his deliverance from death and hell, and his restoration to the forfeited inheritance of heaven!—The transports of joy manifested by the cripple whom Peter and John had healed, were the natural effusions of a grateful heart: we should have wondered if he had not so expressed the feelings of his soul ^h: but he had received no benefit in comparison of that which the believer enjoys when he first embraces the gospel of Christ—Hence our prophet represents the gospel as invariably producing such sensations as the husbandman feels when bringing home the fruits of the field, or the soldier when dividing the spoils of victory ⁱ—]

3. It is, and ever will be, the one subject of thanksgiving in the realms of glory

[The glorified saints never have their attention diverted from it for one single moment: day and night are they singing to him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood ^k—And though the angels are less interested in this subject, because they never needed redeeming grace, yet do they join the general chorus, ascribing honour and glory to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever—Nor will they ever be weary of this subject, such an inexhaustible fund is it of light, and happiness, and glory—]

INFER

^d John viii. 56.

^g Acts viii. 8, 39.

^k Rev. i. 5, 6.

^e Luke ii. 10, 11.

^h Acts iii. 8.

^f Acts ii. 46, 47.

ⁱ Isai. ix. 3, 6.

INFER

1. How strange is it that the gospel should be treated with indifference !

[That it is so treated, needs no proof: but how amazing that it should ever be slighted by those to whom it is sent ! that condemned criminals should disregard the offers of pardon sent them by their prince !—O that there might be no more occasion for that complaint, Who hath believed our report?—Let the very feet of the messengers who bring the tidings be henceforth beautiful in our eyes—]

2. Of what importance is it to distinguish between mere morality, and the gospel of Christ !

[Lectures upon honesty would administer but little comfort to a person about to be executed for breaking the laws of his country: nor can mere discourses on morality administer much comfort to a self-condemning sinner: and if he mistake such discourses for the gospel, he is fatally deceived—The gospel is a full and free offer of salvation through the blood of Christ: and this is glad tidings indeed; like “rivers of water in a dry place, or a shadow of a great rock in a weary land”—O that all who are ambassadors of God may remember the great scope of their ministry, and testify the gospel of the grace of God !—And let all who hear the joyful sound, improve the day of their visitation: blessed are they if they receive the truth in the love thereof; but most aggravated will be their condemnation if they despise the mercy so freely offered them—]

CCVIII. THE GOSPEL A SOURCE OF RICHEST
BLESSINGS.

Isai. xxv. 6—8. *In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees: of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.*

MANY passages of scripture, which, from the language, might be supposed to belong to the Jewish dispensation only, will be found to refer in a more especial manner to the times of the gospel—The “mountain” so frequently mentioned in this place was Mount Zion, which

was distinguished above all other mountains by being the peculiar residence of the Deity : and it should seem that all the great things which God promised to the world, were to be transacted upon that spot—But Mount Zion was a type of the gospel church, wherein God yet more eminently dwells : and it is in the church of Christ that he bestows the blessings which are here promised—The gospel, which is here promulgated, affords

I. Food to the hungry

The gospel calls us to a luxurious feast

[The terms in which this feast is expressed, are evidently intended to raise in our minds the highest possible conceptions of its excellency—"A feast" is far more than a common meal, and conveys an idea of costliness and abundance : a feast "of fat things" imports that the choicest provisions are set forth ; and the fat things being "full of marrow," suggests, that no expense is spared in procuring whatever can provoke the appetite of the guests, or afford them pleasure—But "wines" are also added ; wines that have contracted a delicious flavour by being long kept "upon the lees ;" and wines "well refined," that are bright as a ruby, that "sparkle in the glass," and that delight the eye whilst they gratify the palate—What are we to understand from this accumulation of ideas, but that, as the choicest viands administer nourishment and comfort to the body, so the gospel provides every thing which can exhilarate and support the soul—After all, this representation falls very far short of the truth : for the promises of the gospel are infinitely sweeter to the hungering and thirsting soul than the most exquisite food can be to our taste—Let but a sinner, who pants after pardon, be enabled to apply to his soul that promise of Jehovah, That "crimson sins shall be made white as snow," or that word of Christ, That "who-soever cometh to him he will in no wise cast out," what transports of joy will he not feel ? how will he be "filled as with marrow and fatness, while he praises his God with joyful lips !"—What strength did that word, "My grace is sufficient for thee," administer to Paul under the buffetings of Satan !—In the strength of that one meal he was enabled to go on, not for forty days only, but to the latest hour of his life^a—And such is the gospel to all who cordially embrace it—]

This feast has God himself prepared for all people

[It is none other than "the Lord of hosts" who has spread this table at his own expense—And he invites "all people,"

^a In allusion to Elijah, 1 Kings xix. 7, 8.

people," not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also; yea, the very vilest of the human race—He sends out his servants into the highways and hedges, to call the halt, the lame, and the blind, and orders them to take no refusal, but to "compel them to come in"^b—Yea, though in every succeeding age there have been myriads of guests brought in, yet his message to *us* is, that "yet there is room"—]

But, as this feast can be of no use to those who feel not their need of it, nor discern its excellency, the gospel suits itself to our necessities, and offers

II. Light to the blind

There is a thick, impenetrable "vail" over the hearts of men

[The lusts and prejudices of men cast a film over their eyes, and incapacitate them for discerning spiritual things: and Satan by his subtle devices confirms their blindness^c—As the Jews, even while Moses was read to them every sabbath day, were unable, by reason of the vail that was upon their hearts, to comprehend the great ends and purposes of the Mosaic dispensation^d, so thousands who live under the light of the gospel are total strangers to its fundamental truths; or admit them only in theory, while they are destitute of any experimental knowledge of them in their hearts—"They have eyes, but see not; ears, but hear not; hearts, but understand not"—]

But God by his gospel removes this vail

["He who commanded light to shine out of darkness will shine into the hearts" of those who seek him—"The things which flesh and blood could never have discovered, he will reveal unto them"^e—He will shew them the evil of sin, the depravity of their hearts, the fulness and suitableness of Christ, the stability of the covenant, together with every thing else which they need to know—He will not merely turn aside the vail, and give them a transient view of the holy of holies, but will "destroy" the vail, and "rend it in pieces from the top to the bottom"—It is true, this clear knowledge of divine truth will not be imparted all at once; but it shall gradually increase till they "see as they are seen, and know as they are known"—]

To complete the happiness of his people, God further promises

III. Victory

^b Matt. xxii. 4. Luke xiv. 17, 21, 22.

^d 2 Cor. iii. 14, 15.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^e Matt. xvi. 17.

III. Victory to the oppressed

The former part of the text refers to the apostolic and millennial periods; but the latter will not be accomplished till the day of judgment—To that season in particular St. Paul applies the words before us^f; taking him for our guide, we are in no danger of misinterpreting their import, whilst we say, that God will rescue us from

1. The power of death

[Death is even now disarmed of its sting; and the king of terrors is made our friend—They who through the gospel are enabled to live to Christ, may justly account it “gain to die:” not life only, but even death itself, is numbered among their treasures^g—Such is their victory over it, that it is an object of hope and desire rather than of terror and aversion^h—And when it comes, they are not so properly said to die, as to “fall asleep in Jesus”—Nor will its apparent triumphs be of long duration; for that which swallowed up mankind with insatiable avidity, shall itself “be swallowed up in victory,” and not a vestige of it ever again be found among the saints of God—]

2. The sorrows of sin

[While we continue in the body there will be occasion for us to “go on our way weeping”—But even now the sorrows of believers are widely different from the sorrows of the world: instead of corroding the heart, they bring a peace along with them; and the persons who are most affected with them, so far from wishing to get rid of them, desire to have them more deep and abiding—But ere long they shall sully the face no more; but shall be “wiped away” by the hand of a compassionate Father, and be followed by an harvest of eternal joyⁱ—]

3. The reproaches of the world

[There is scarcely any thing which an ungodly world will not say or do, to asperse the character of the godly, and to destroy their peace—But God in this world so far “takes away their rebuke,” as often to manifest himself to them, and to interpose visibly on their behalf^k—But in a little time “He will bring forth their righteousness as the noon day;” and they who were regarded “as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things,” shall be openly acknowledged as the children of the living God—]

ADDRESS

^f 1 Cor. xv. 54.

^g Phil. i. 21. 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^h Phil. i. 23.

ⁱ Rev. xxi. 4. and vii. 16, 17.

^k Ex. gr. Joseph, Daniel, the Hebrew youths, &c.

ADDRESS

1. To those who are living at a distance from God

[Whatever you may promise yourselves from the enjoyment of this world, you in reality are feeding only on husks; and however you may boast of attainments in philosophy, there is a veil on your hearts that hides from you all spiritual knowledge—Besides, whatever satisfaction you feel, or whatever reputation you enjoy, death will speedily swallow up both you and it, and will consign you over to everlasting shame and misery—Say, then, whether you have not made a wretched choice; and whether the mourning and despised Christian be not in a far happier state than you?—It is not however too late for you to repent: the invitations of the gospel are sent to you as well as to others; and if you put away your vain excuses, and return to God as prodigals, you shall find a cordial welcome, and feast this very hour on the fatted calf—O that the “scales may fall from your eyes;” and that, being “brought from darkness unto light, you may be turned from the power of Satan unto God!”—]

2. To those who are come to God's holy mountain

[You find that the promises of the gospel have not disappointed you—If you are not “satisfied with the plenteousness of God's house,” it is not because the provisions are withheld from you, but because you want a better appetite for them—“Be not straitened in yourselves;” and be sure you never shall be straitened in your God: “open your mouth wide, and he will fill it”—Above all things remember to feed continually on “the body and blood of your beloved Lord; for his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed¹”—And soon you shall be called to the banquet above, where “your Lord shall gird himself and come forth to serve you”—Then shall all these promises receive their full accomplishment; and you shall possess that “fulness of joy which is at God's right hand for evermore”—]

¹ John vi. 54, 55.

CCIX. THE SCOPE AND TENDENCY OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. xl. 1, 2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

THE ministerial office is fitly compared to that of a steward, who divides to every one his proper portion^a. The execution of it calls for much wisdom and discretion, because there must be a diversity both in the matter and manner of our addresses corresponding with the different states of the people to whom we minister. To some we must of necessity proclaim the terrors of God's law, however painful such a discharge of our duty may be: but the great scope of our ministry is to comfort the Lord's people, and be "helpers of their joy." The commission here given to the servants of Jehovah leads us to observe, that

I. God earnestly desires the comfort and happiness of his people

There are a people, chosen by the Father, redeemed by Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit, who are eminently the Lord's people^b. And that God is peculiarly solicitous to promote their comfort, appears

1. From the commission which he gave to his beloved Son

[He sent his Son into the world to execute his eternal counsels—And our Lord himself, in his first public address to the people, declared, that the comfort of mourners was a principal object of his mission^c—]

2. From the end for which he sends his Spirit into the hearts of men

[God sends his Spirit to testify of Christ^d, to witness our adoption into his family^e, and to seal us unto the day of redemption^f—In performing these offices he comforts our souls—And he is, on that very account, distinguished by the name of "*the Comforter*"^g—]

3. From the titles which the Father himself assumes

[He calls himself "The God of consolation^h," and "the Comforter of all them that are cast downⁱ"—He compares his concern to that of a Father pitying his child^k, and to a mother comforting with tenderest assiduities her afflicted infant^l—Yea, he assures us that his regards far exceed those of the most affectionate parent in the universe^m—]

4. From

^a 2 Tim. ii. 15. ^b Luke xii. 42.

^b Deut. vii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^c Isai. lxi. 1—3. Luke iv. 17—19.

^d John xv. 26.

^e Rom. viii. 15.

^f Eph. i. 13, 14.

^g John xvi. 7.

^h Rom. xv. 5.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 6.

^k Ps. ciii. 13.

^l Isai. lxvi. 13.

^m Isai. xlix. 15.

4. From the solemn charge he gives to ministers

[He sends his servants "to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."ⁿ And he especially charges them to "strengthen the weak hands, to confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not; your God will come and save you."^o *Thrice* is that injunction repeated in the text: and in the execution of this duty we are justly called, "The helpers of your joy."^p]

5. From the dispensations both of his providence and grace

[When he suffered his beloved Son to be tempted in all things like unto us, it was with a view to comfort us under our temptations.^q And when he comforted St. Paul under his multiplied afflictions, he still consulted the comfort of his church and people:^r yea, however he diversified his dispensations, he had invariably the same gracious object in view.^s]

As a further proof of his regard for our comfort, we may observe that

II. He has made abundant provision for it in his word

The message which we are commanded to deliver to his people, contains in it the richest sources of consolation. We proclaim to them, that

1. Their "warfare is accomplished"

[This, as referring to the captives in Babylon, foretold their deliverance from captivity. But it chiefly relates to the deliverance of the church from the bondage and misery to which they were subject under the Mosaic dispensation. The burthensome yoke of ceremonies was to be abolished at the coming of Christ^t, and to be succeeded by "a law of perfect liberty."^u—A similar deliverance every soul experiences, as soon as ever it believes in Christ: the chains of sin, where-with it was bound, fall off^x; and, though there yet remain many conflicts to be endured, yet is Satan's power irrecoverably broken; and the once captive sinner is brought into the glorious liberty of God's children.^y—What rich consolation must this of necessity administer to the weary, and heavy-laden^z!—]

2. Their iniquity is pardoned

[The Lord's people, not excepting the least or meanest of them,

ⁿ Acts xxvi. 18.

^q Heb. ii. 18.

^t Col. ii. 14.

^y John viii. 36.

^o Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^r 2 Cor. i. 3, 4.

^u Jam. i. 25.

^z Matt. xi. 28—30.

^p 2 Cor. i. 24.

^s Ib. 6.

^x Rom. viii. 2.

them, have all their iniquities forgiven^a—What consolation then can they want? Let their circumstances in other respects be ever so afflictive, they may be of good cheer^b:” for we have the united testimony of prophets and apostles, that they are truly blessed^c—]

3. They have received mercies that far overbalance all their afflictions

[The prophet does not mean that the Lord’s people are punished beyond their deserts (for this were contrary both to scripture and experience^d) but that their mercies far exceed any judgments which may have been inflicted on them on account of sin. God will punish his people (and it is necessary that he should) but their enjoying of his favour, and their prospect of his glory, are mercies, in comparison of which their troubles are not worth a thought—Indeed their very chastisements are mercies in disguise^e; and have been acknowledged as such by those who have endured them in an abundant measure^f—]

Let us LEARN then from this subject

1. The genuine tendency of the gospel

[The gospel is generally considered as a source of melancholy, and consequently, as inimical to men’s happiness. But the very reverse of this is true. It calls men indeed to repentance, and, *in this view*, may be considered as an occasion of sorrow: but it is a salutary sorrow that will be followed by joy: nor can any one duly reflect on the expressions of the text, without acknowledging, that a reliance on God’s promises and oath revealed in the gospel, is, as it was intended to be, a source of “strong consolation,” to all the people of God^g. Let this absurd prejudice then be put away, and the gospel be received by us with gratitude and joy.]

2. The wonderful difference between those who embrace, and those who disregard the gospel

[Can *that* be said of carnal and worldly men, which is here spoken of the Lord’s people? Are *their* chains broken? *their* sins forgiven? *their* comforts greater than any judgments that await them? No: they are yet in bondage to sin and Satan; their sins are all “sealed up in a bag” against the day of judgment; and the wrath of God is shortly coming upon them to the uttermost. Then it will appear how great a
“difference

^a Col. ii. 13. Ps. ciii. 12. Acts xiii. 39.

^b Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. Rom. iv. 7, 8.

^c Heb. xii. 10.

^d Ps. cxix. 67, 75.

^e Matt. ix. 2.

^f Ezr. ix. 13.

^g Heb. vi. 17, 18.

“ difference there is between those who serve the Lord, and those who serve him not ^h.” Let not this distinction then be made a subject of profane ridicule, but a motive to seek the Lord, that we may be numbered with his people, and be made partakers of his benefits.]

^h Mal. iii. 18.

CCX. CONSOLATION FOR THE AFFLICTED.

Isai. li. 1—3, *Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the Rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places, he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.*

AN attention to the voice of God in his word would comfort us under all troubles, and keep us steadfast amidst all the vicissitudes of life—God, anxious for the welfare of his people, says continually, Hearken to me, hearken to me ^a—He has just before exhorted them, when walking in darkness, to trust in him ^b—He now bids them bear in mind his former mercies, and expect yet richer blessings at his hands, when the destined period of their captivity shall have elapsed—Thus did God provide comfort for them against the day of their calamity—And the same comfort is reserved for all his people in their seasons of darkness or affliction—To obtain the consolation which the text is suited to convey, it will be proper to consider

I. What God has done for us already

The description given of God's people is sufficiently appropriate, and will distinguish them from all other people upon earth—They “ seek ” the favour of “ the Lord,” and “ follow after ” it with incessant care in the way of “ righteousness”—But

They

^a Ver. 1, 4, 7.

^b Isai. l. 10.

They once had little prospect of ever attaining to the blessings they enjoy

[The Jewish nation was to descend from Abraham; but the promised seed was not given him till, according to the course of nature, there was no probability that his family should be increased—There was *then* little reason to expect that that nation ever should exist—Thus the people of God may look back upon the time that they were lying as stones in a quarry, and as clay in a pit—How little prospect was there *then*, that they should ever form a part of “God’s spiritual building!”—They were as blind, as stupid, as averse to God and holy exercises, as any people in the universe—If they “ran not to the same excess of riot” as others, they were restrained merely by the overruling providence of God, and not by any hatred of sin which they had more than others—]

Yet they are now “called and blessed” of the Lord

[The descendants of Abraham rapidly increased, and in process of time formed a very numerous and powerful nation—Who that beheld them at their departure from Egypt would have imagined that, only four hundred years before, these two millions of people had no existence but in the loins of Abraham?—And who, that sees a person now “following after righteousness,” would imagine that he was once a determined enemy to God, and had a nature as corrupt as any of his fellow creatures?—Let the saints remember what they were, that they may see what “great things the Lord has done for them”—Let them “walk softly all the days of their life” under a sense of their former guilt; and stand amazed at the goodness of their God, who has so distinguished them with his favour—]

Nor is this any thing more than an earnest of

II. What he has engaged to do

As the church at large, so every individual member of it may be in very afflictive circumstances

[The Jews were reduced to the greatest distress during their captivity in Babylon; and their once fertile country was become a wilderness; nor could they remember Zion but with deep sorrow and regret—Thus the people of God at this time may be brought into great tribulation—Through persecution or temptation their “sorrows may be enlarged,” and their joys be turned into pain and anguish—]

But God promises to interpose for them in the time of need

[He

[He repeatedly foretold that he would deliver his people from their Babylonish captivity; and restore them with joy and triumph to their own land—This was a faint representation of what he would do for the true seed of Abraham under the Christian dispensation—He will revive his people with spiritual consolations—He will make their hearts, which now seem barren, or productive only of thorns, to be “fruitful in every good word and work”—*Paradise* itself, before sin had deformed its beauty, was a just emblem of what the soul shall be when God returns to visit it—The harp hung upon the willows shall be strung anew; “joy and gladness” shall succeed to the effusions of sorrow, and the groans of contrition yield to “thanksgivings and the voice of melody”—Let but the afflicted soul tarry the Lord’s leisure, and it shall surely experience the wished-for deliverance—]

To encourage all to confide in this promise, let us consider

III. In what respects the recollection of mercies received may strengthen our expectation of those that are promised

Nothing could be more animating to the Jews in Babylon than the recollection of what God had done in raising so flourishing a tree from the dead stock of Sarah’s womb, and in continuing to water it for so many centuries, notwithstanding the bad fruit it had continued to produce—Nor can any thing be more consoling to us than a retrospective view of God’s dealings with us—In them we may behold

1. His sovereign grace

[In every thing relative to the raising of the Jewish nation God displayed his sovereignty—And may we not behold the same in his choice of *us*?—Why did he hew *us* out of the quarry, while such a mass of stone, equally fit for his purpose, was left behind?—Why did he “form *us* into vessels of honour,” while so much of the very “same lump was left to form vessels of dishonour?”—Who shall deny the fact that such a selection has been made? or “Who shall say unto God, What doest thou?”—Shall any drooping saints then despond because of their unworthiness? Let them remember, that, as God never chose them for their superior worthiness, so he may still continue his favours towards them notwithstanding their unworthiness—His grace is still his own as much as ever; and, *if they do but lament their unworthiness and cast themselves on his mercy*, it shall still be glorified in their restoration and bliss—]

2. His

2. His almighty power

[As the Omnipotence of God was manifest in producing such a nation from two, whose "bodies were as good as dead," so is it no less visible in the "quickenings of those who are dead in sin," and forming "an host of living saints from those who were like dry bones scattered over the face of the earth"—Can any then, who have been quickened by grace, doubt whether God be *able* to preserve or restore them?—Can "any thing appear to them too hard for God?"—Surely though their souls appear at present only like a desert or a wilderness, they need "not stagger at the promises of God;" but yet may entertain the hope that they may "blossom as the rose," yea, that they shall "put off their sackcloth, and gird them with gladness"—]

3. His unchanging faithfulness

[After God had promised to Abraham, he never would recede—Though he delayed, he did not forget his promise—And even when constrained to punish his people, he did not cast them off—Not even at this time are they finally abandoned; but are preserved a distinct people, monuments of God's faithfulness, and a seed for a future harvest—And is not every saint a distinguished monument of God's faithfulness?—Would any one stone of God's building have withstood the shocks and tempests that have assaulted it, if God himself had not interposed to keep it fixed on the foundation?—Would not every vessel of his sanctuary have been dashed in pieces times without number, if the potter himself had not averted the stroke or hardened us to endure it?—Where is there a saint who is not a wonder to himself, a spark kept alive in the midst of the ocean?—Well then may the faithfulness we have already experienced confirm our hope, that God "will never leave us nor forsake us"—And well may the most disconsolate of God's people wait, "knowing in whom they have believed," and assuredly expecting the promised revival—]

APPLICATION

Let us HEARKEN to the advice given us in the text

1. Let us, both for our humiliation and comfort, review the dispensations of God's providence and grace towards us . . .

2. Let us, under our heaviest trials, look forward to the season when God's promises shall receive their final accomplishment . . .

CCXI. THE CHANGE WROUGHT BY THE GOSPEL.

Isai. lv. 12, 13. *For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

THE change wrought annually on the face of nature from desolation and barrenness to beauty and fruitfulness, is a lively representation of the change effected by the gospel of Christ. "The rain and the snow descending on the earth" nourish the whole vegetable creation, and cause every part of it to spring forth in its appointed season: and, in the same manner, "the word of God, dropping as the rain, and distilling as the dew" upon the souls of men, infuses life into them, and renders them fruitful in every good word and work. This is the parallel drawn by the prophet himself, who, expatiating on the subject, predicts, under the image of the Jews return from Babylon, the progress of the gospel in renovating the intellectual and spiritual world. His words will lead us to consider

I. The effects of the preached gospel

The civilizing of the world is a very small part of the work which the gospel is intended to accomplish. It is sent

1. To inspire new feelings

[Man in his natural state is an entire stranger to spiritual joy, or solid peace. The peace that flows from a want of foresight or reflection, and the joy that consists in mere animal gratifications, he may possess: but he is as destitute of spiritual enjoyments, as the brute creation are of intellectual pleasure. His state however is wonderfully changed when he receives the word of God in truth. At first indeed he feels trouble and anguish; but as soon as ever he has a sense of his acceptance with God, his tears are wiped away, and "the bones which were broken rejoice." It frequently happens, especially where the preceding sorrows have been deep, that the joy which succeeds them is rapturous and abundant. The surprise of Peter, on the eve of his expected execution, was not unlike that of a new convert: suddenly, a light shone in upon him,

him, and his chains fell off, and the prison doors flew open, and an angel conducted him out, so that he could not persuade himself that he was awake, but thought he saw a vision : thus when the new convert is first brought forth into light and liberty, and finds the obstacles, which had seemed insurmountable, removed, he is ready to think it must be all a delusion : it is with him as with those of old, “ when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream : then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing ;” yea, “ the very hills break forth before him into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands.” We must not however suppose, that all are equally elated ; or that the joy which any feel will continue with them : it will rather subside into a peaceful tranquillity of mind : they may *go out with joy* ; but they will be *led forth with peace*. The Saviour’s joy, which is to be fulfilled in us, consisted rather in peace than exultation ; and such is the legacy that he has left to us^a. At first we are like a stream rippling and murmuring near the fountain head ; but afterwards we resemble rather the deepened river flowing with silent majesty.]

2. To infuse new dispositions

[A thorny bush is unproductive and worthless ; as a brier is unseemly and injurious. The one is a just image of the more decent of mankind ; the other, of the more profane. All are low and grovelling in their nature, having no desires beyond this present world ; and too many, by their influence as well as by their example, would impede the progress of those who are walking in the good way. The fir-tree on the other hand lifts its head on high ; while the myrtle diffuses its fragrance all around ; and both of them retain their verdure all the year : yet such shall the vilest of mankind become, when once they embrace the gospel of Christ. They shall soar to heaven with devout affections ; they shall spread around them a sweet savour of the knowledge of Christ ; they shall be unfading ornaments in the place where they grow ; and instead of wounding, like the brier, all that come in contact with them, they shall, like the myrtle, emit the sweeter fragrance the more they are bruised, and perfume, as it were, the very hand that bruises them.]

To impress our minds with a due esteem for the gospel, let us proceed to consider

II. The excellency of those effects

There is an inherent excellence in holy dispositions, which, independent of the consequences flowing from them

^a John xvii. 13. and xiv. 27.

them to ourselves or to society, must render them amiable in our eyes. But, as the text limits our views to the honour which accrues from them to God, we shall content ourselves with observing, that the change effected by the gospel is to the Lord

1. An occasion of praise

[None who are quickened and renewed by the word ever take the honour to themselves : all with one voice cry, " He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God ; therefore, Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." The greater the change that is wrought in any person's heart, the less will he be disposed to arrogate any thing to himself on account of it : and most of all, " when the top-stone of the spiritual building shall be brought forth, will he shout, Grace, grace unto it." From his first acquaintance with divine truth will he begin to speak of God with love and gratitude. His own experience will furnish him with an inexhaustible fund of praise and thanksgiving. Nor will his acknowledgments any longer be a dull recital of an established creed, but the lively effusions of a grateful heart.

Now if that be deemed excellent, which causes the name of any human being to be held in estimation, and to be transmitted to posterity with honour, how much more must that be excellent, which makes the name of God to be revered and adored !]

2. A monument of glory

[It is not in this world only that God is glorified by the dispensations of his grace : at the day of judgment every saint will " be to him for a name, and for a praise and for a glory." " Christ will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired *in* all that believe." How *sovereign* will the *grace* of God appear to every one amongst them, when each sees himself as a brand plucked out of the fire ! What *stupendous wisdom* will be discovered in the plan, whereby he has effected their restoration to his favour ! What *marvellous patience* will he appear to have exercised towards them under all their backslidings ; and what *unbounded mercy* in pardoning their multiplied transgressions ! Nor will his *power* be less an object of admiration, when it is seen how *wonderfully* it has been *exerted* in converting their souls, and in preserving them unto his heavenly kingdom. Yea, as long as there shall exist one glorified saint in heaven, so long shall the perfections of the Godhead be most eminently displayed in the salvation of sinful man.

How excellent then must that change be, which to all eternity shall be the brightest monument of the divine perfections ! The work of creation is excellent, though it is so

soon to pass away : but that, glorious as it is, has no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth in the new creation.]

INFER

1. What encouragement have men to hear the gospel!

[As a person who had never seen the face of nature but in the depth of winter, would scarcely conceive it possible that so great an alteration could take place in it as is annually made within the space of a few weeks, so are many ready to imagine, that their hard and barren hearts are incapable of experiencing such a change as God requires. But his word is as powerful as ever : it is still “ like fire, or like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces : ” and though “ it runs not, nor is glorified ” to the same extent as in former days, yet wherever it is preached in sincerity and truth there are some to attest its efficacy, and to prove that “ it is the power of God to the salvation of men. ” Let none then despair : for though “ the treasure be put into an earthen vessel, God will display the excellency of his power by means of it : ” he will plant the fir-tree and the myrtle where nothing grew but thorns and briers ; “ he will make the wilderness like Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord. ”]

2. What a sure criterion have we whereby to judge of our state !

[An insensibility with respect to spiritual things characterizes the natural man ; and a quickness of perception with respect to them marks the person in whom the word of God has taken due effect. Have we then surrendered up our false peace, and our carnal joy ? and have we attained to a scriptural “ joy and peace in believing ? ” Have the creatures all around us been led, as it were, to sympathize with us, and congratulate us on the change ? Look then next to the tempers and dispositions of the soul : have the low grovelling desires of the carnal mind been made to ascend to heaven ; and the natural aversion to holy exercises been exchanged for an unfeigned delight in them ? In short, is God now glorified in the whole of our deportment, so that, whosoever beholds our spirit and conduct is constrained to admire the grace of God in us ? Doubtless, this change is not perfect in any ; nor can we expect it to be so, while we carry about with us this body of sin and death ; but is the change begun ? and is it carrying on towards perfection ? O that on considering these questions we might have the testimony of our consciences that things are so ! But if there be no evidence of these things, let us beware, lest, instead of being eternal monuments of God’s love, we be objects of his everlasting displeasure.]

CCXII. THE CHANGE TO BE WROUGHT BY THE
GOSPEL IN THE LATTER DAY.

Isai. xi. 6—9. And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

THE happiness and prosperity of kingdoms depend much on the wisdom and equity of those who govern. Yet the best of rulers cannot always secure their people either from the turbulence of faction, or from the assaults of foreign enemies. Thus it is with the kingdom of Christ on earth. He, the Lord and governor of all, is endowed with every qualification for the discharge of his regal office^a, and executes that office with consummate equity and wisdom^b: yet, through the infirmities of his subjects, and the malice of his adversaries, his kingdom is far from enjoying the full advantages of his administration. There will, however, be a time, when his dominion shall be extended over all the earth, and perfect peace shall reign throughout all his empire.

The prophecy on which this observation is grounded, will naturally lead us to shew

I. The change that shall be wrought on men in the latter day

Men in their intercourse with each other too much resemble the brute creation

[It is indeed humiliating to compare man with venomous and ferocious beasts: but there is scarcely any beast, however savage, to which God himself has not compared us^c. Nor is it by figurative representations only, but by plain and express declarations, that God has marked the evil dispositions of our fallen nature^d. And if we either look around us or within

^a Ver. 1—4.

^b Ver. 5.

^c He likens us to foxes, Song ii. 15; serpents and vipers, Matt. iii. 7. and xxiii. 33; wolves, Matt. x. 16; wild asses, Jer. ii. 24; wild boars, Ps. lxxx. 13; wild bulls, Isai. li. 20, &c.

^d Rom. i. 29—31. 2 Tim. iii. 2—4.

within us, we shall see that his descriptions are by no means exaggerated. Let any one observe the proud and envious, the wrathful and malicious, the selfish and covetous workings of the heart, and he shall soon perceive that, if man were unrestrained by human laws, he would prey upon his fellow-man with as much ferocity as the beasts themselves.]

But in the latter day universal harmony shall prevail

[Then this beautiful description shall be fully realized. Men shall dwell together as the beasts in the ark, none attempting to hurt or destroy another: or rather, they shall dwell together as the beasts in Paradise; none having so much as a disposition to hurt; but all filled with gentleness and love.

This event is foretold in other passages of holy writ*; and it shall surely be accomplished at the appointed season: "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."]

To confirm our expectation of this universal change, let us consider

II. The means by which it shall be effected

It is beyond the power of any human efforts to accomplish it

[However civilization may have changed the manners of men, it is but too evident that their hearts are the same as ever. In proof of this we need only appeal to the bloody wars which nations wage with each other; to the duels which are fought on account of the most trifling injuries or insults; and to the execrable traffic in slaves, which to the disgrace of the Christian name, yea, to the disgrace of humanity itself, is carried on amongst us, in spite of all the efforts that have been made for its abolition. If further proof were necessary, we may all find it very abundantly in the various circles in which we move: for there is scarcely a society, or even a single family, in which feuds, dissensions, quarrels, do not frequently arise: yea, the very relatives most interested in cultivating love and harmony, are often most at variance. Does not this shew how untamed we are, notwithstanding the restraints of wholesome laws, and the instructions given us in the word of God?]

But the gospel of Christ, when universally received, shall soon effect it

[Men continue like wild beasts, because "they know not the Lord^f." The knowledge of Christ, and of his salvation, would produce a wonderful change on their spirit and conduct. Behold, what it wrought as soon as ever the gospel was preached!

* Isai. lxxv. 25.

^f 1 Sam. ii. 12.

preached ! Thousands of blood-thirsty murderers were transformed into the most lovely and loving of the human race ^g. And, wherever it is received, its tendency is the same. It renews all after the same image ^h; brings all into the same family ⁱ; unites all in the same interests ^k; and forms all into one mystical body ^l: how then can it fail of producing harmony and love ? This knowledge shall at a future period be universally diffused ^m; and these effects shall as universally result from it ⁿ.]

Let us LEARN from this subject

1. The nature of true conversion

[Conversion does not consist in embracing any tenets, however scriptural, or important. The knowledge of Christ is indeed, as has been before observed, *the means* of converting us; but conversion itself consists in a thorough change in all our tempers, dispositions and conduct, and in a renewal of our souls after the divine image ^o. The lion must become a lamb: we must “ become as little children, if ever we would enter into the kingdom of heaven ^p.”]

2. The excellency of the gospel

[In vain is the moral fitness of things insisted on; yea, in vain are the terrors of hell displayed, for the conversion of men: nothing but the knowledge of Christ crucified can ever operate on the soul of man, so as to produce in it a radical and universal change. But, where Christ is known aright, there the whole man will assume a new character: and in proportion as his glory is seen by us, we shall be transformed into his image ^q. Let not the Gospel then be despised as fanatical, or be defamed as licentious; but let it be revered and embraced with our whole hearts.]

3. The blessedness of those who know the Lord

[It is to be lamented that the knowledge of Christ does not produce in these days the *full* effects that were visible in the apostles. But the fault is in *us*, and not in the gospel. Nevertheless there are many, who, even in this age of vice and infidelity, are monuments of the power and grace of Christ; and who, from having been as despitiful towards each other as Jews and Gentiles, are living in the sweetest communion with each other, and with their God. Happy they, whose views are thus rectified, whose passions are thus subdued, and
whose

^g Acts iv. 32.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 19. 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^l 1 Cor. xii. 20, 21, 25, 27.

ⁿ Isai. ii. 4. and Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^p Matt. xviii. 3.

^h Eph. iv. 22—24.

^k Eph. iv. 4, 5.

^m Hab. ii. 14.

^o 2 Cor. v. 17.

^q 2 Cor. iii. 18.

whose lives are thus regulated by the gospel of Christ! They have indeed a paradise below; and shall soon enjoy uninterrupted harmony in heaven^r.]

^r 1 John i. 3. and iv. 16, 17.

CCXIII. THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.

Ps. lxxii. 16. *There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.*

IN many parts of scripture the typical sense is more manifest than the literal—It is so in the Psalm before us—This Psalm is a description of the reign of Solomon, who was the first of the “kings” that was also a “king’s son”—The extent, duration, and happiness of his government are predicted by David his father—But a greater than Solomon is here—There can be no doubt but that the glory of the Messiah’s kingdom is here described—The extent of that is unbounded, and the blessedness of it is eternal—The words of the text, according to their *literal* meaning, declare the fruitfulness of the land, and the increase of population in the days of Solomon—But they *typically* represent the spread of the gospel under the Christian dispensation, and the multitudes of converts that shall become the subjects of Messiah’s kingdom—They naturally lead us to consider

I. The representation here given of the preached gospel

The gospel is compared to seed cast upon the earth

[This is a frequent comparison in the scriptures; nor can any other be more just—The seed is that from which the whole harvest springs—Weeds will grow of themselves, but corn requires culture; nor can any harvest be expected but in consequence of a patient and laborious attention to the duties of husbandry—Thus it is also with the gospel—That is the seed from which alone any fruit will arise to God—Men will bring forth all manner of evil fruits without any instruction or advice—But never will they abound in fruits of righteousness unless the seed of divine truth be first sown in their hearts—]

The place whereon this seed is cast is like “the tops of mountains”

[Vallies are fruitful ; but mountains, and especially the mountain-tops, are barren—They rarely have any soil ; nor, if they had, would they be proper situations for the sowing of corn—Were any corn to spring up upon them, the storms and tempests would destroy it long before it could arrive at maturity—Such is the world at large, and the heart of every individual in it, barren in itself, and exposed to storms of passion and floods of temptation—And most discouraging is the prospect of that labourer who goes forth to sow his corn on such a soil—

Moreover the mountain-tops were the places where the idols of the heathen deities were worshipped^a—Thus were they the seat of all superstition and idolatry—What a view does this give us of the place where the gospel seed is sown !—Yet, alas ! it is but too just a representation both of the world, and of the heart of man—Superstition and idolatry abound in every place and every heart—What seed then can be expected ever to flourish in so foul a soil ?—]

Nor is there more than a mere “ handful ” of corn sown there

[If the seed were multiplied in proportion to the badness of the soil, there might still be some little hope of an harvest—But of what use is a mere handful of corn when cast on a surface of such vast extent ?—What hope could there be that the whole world should be evangelized by twelve poor fishermen ?—Even at this time, how wide the field, and how few the labourers !—Myriads of our fellow-creatures never so much as hear the name of Christ ; and of those who do, there are, alas ! too many who never have the whole counsel of God declared unto them—]

But notwithstanding these discouragements we shall not despair of the success of the gospel, if we consider

II. The blessing which God has promised to it

The prophecy before us declares that the increase of this seed shall be

1. Strong

[The woods of “ Lebanon ” were proverbially grand—Waving their lofty heads, they seemed to defy the storms and tempests—Such was to be the fruit that should spring from the gospel seed—Weak as corn is to withstand a storm, *that* which was to grow upon the mountain-tops should be firm as the deep—

^a In reference to this custom, the prophet Isaiah, foretelling the triumph of the gospel over all false religions, says, “ The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established *on the top of the mountains.* ”

deep-rooted cedars—And has not the event justified the prediction?—The powers of earth and hell combined against the infant church, but were not able to crush it—Neither imprisonment nor death could intimidate the disciples of Jesus—Even the weaker sex were enabled to endure the most cruel tortures, and to glory in their tribulations for Jesus' sake—In every successive age the same holy fortitude has characterized the followers of the Lamb—If any through the fear of man have forsaken the church, they have only proved thereby that they never truly belonged to it; “they went out from us because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us^b”—Every true believer has been faithful unto death—]

2. Numerous

[What more numerous than the piles of grass?—Yet such, it was foretold, should be the converts to Christianity—And how was this verified in the apostolic age!—Thousands were converted by one single sermon—In a few years the followers of Christ filled, not Judea alone, but also the whole Roman empire—At the reformation too the seed that had long lain under the earth, sprang up and yielded a glorious harvest—But the promised period is yet future, though, we hope, it is hastening on apace—In the latter day “the people of God shall be as the stars of heaven for multitude”—“A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation^c”—Yea, “a nation shall be born in a day”—And “All the ends of the earth shall remember themselves and turn unto the Lord^d”—There still indeed may be seasons when, as in former ages, they shall be mown down by their persecutors; but they shall spring up again like the grass; and the very blood of the martyrs shall be the seed of the church—“The knowledge of the Lord shall surely cover the earth as the waters cover the sea^e”—]

This subject may well excite in us

1. Thankfulness for what is past

[What a mercy is it, that, when only an handful of corn is sown on the earth, some grains of it should fall on this barren spot!—and what a signal mercy if it have sprung up in our hearts!—And have we not reason to hope that this is indeed the case?—If we cannot boast of multitudes like the piles of grass, are there not sufficient to shew the virtue of the gospel seed, and the blessing of God upon the sowing of it?—Have not some attained an height and stability, and maintained their steadfastness against the united assaults of the

^b 1 John ii. 19.

^d Ps. xxii. 27.

^c Isai. lx. 22.

^e Hab. ii. 14.

the world, the flesh, and the devil?—Let us then rejoice and be thankful to God for such distinguished blessings—And let us still shew ourselves to have been “planted in the house of the Lord by flourishing in the courts of our God”—]

2. Hope respecting the future

[The promise of God is sure, and shall be fulfilled in its season—We cannot but grieve when we see the barrenness of the field, and fewness of faithful labourers—But there is nothing impossible with God—He can send forth labourers into his harvest, and give the most abundant success to the seed sown—Yea, he can overrule the most adverse circumstances for the manifestation of his own glory—Let us wait upon him then in prayer, and cry from our inmost souls, “Thy kingdom come”—Let us beg, “That the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified” throughout the world^f—And let us look forward in certain expectation, that the “grain of mustard-seed shall become a great tree^g,” and that in due time “All shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest^h”—]

^f 2 Thess. iii. 1.

^g Matt. xiii. 32.

^h Jer. xxxi. 34.

CCXIV. THE STONE THAT BECAME A MOUNTAIN.

Dan. ii. 44. *In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces, and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.*

THE various revolutions of kingdoms, how casual and contingent soever they may appear, are all foreordained in the inscrutable counsels of the Deity, and made subservient to the accomplishment of his eternal purpose—Indeed they seem to be marked in scripture solely in reference to the church of God; as though the rise and fall of empires were scarcely worth a mention, except as they accelerate or retard the progress of true religion—In the time of the Babylonish captivity God gave to Nebuchadnezzar a very remarkable dream, and interpreted it to him by the prophet Daniel—There appeared to him an image, whose head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of iron and clay; on the
feet

feet of which a stone fell, that utterly demolished the whole—This imported the succession of four great monarchies, and the erection of the Messiah's kingdom upon the ruins of them all—Respecting this kingdom it will be proper to consider

I. Its rise

Two things are specified with respect to the rise of Christ's kingdom in the world

1. The time

[The Babylonish, Persian, and Grecian monarchies, were to rise in succession, each on the ruins of that which preceded it; and at last the Roman empire was to swallow up, as it were, and comprehend them all—And “in the time of the kings” belonging to this last kingdom, even while they should enjoy the utmost plenitude of their power, another kingdom was to arise, the kingdom of the Messiah—This was accurately accomplished; for Christ was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, when the Roman empire was at the summit of its strength and grandeur: and, within the space of about fifty years from that time, his kingdom was spread, not only over Judea, but over a great part of the known world—]

2. The manner

[It was foretold that a “stone which should be cut out without hands, should break in pieces this vast image;” that “the God of heaven should set up a kingdom” solely by his own power, *without the intervention of human force or policy*; or, to use the words of another prophet, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”—This also was remarkably fulfilled in the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world—The persons who were his principal supporters, were a few illiterate fishermen, alike untutored in philosophy, and unassisted by the authority of earthly magistrates—They were expressly forbidden to use the sword^a; and the most learned of all the apostles suppressed every thing that savoured of carnal wisdom, lest he should make the cross of Christ of none effect^b—Yet, notwithstanding their weapons were not carnal, they were mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds of sin and Satan^c—And indeed the heavenly treasure was committed thus to earthen vessels on purpose that the excellency of the power might more evidently appear to be of God^d—]

In

^a Matt. xxvi. 52.

^c 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^b 1 Cor. i. 17. and ii. 1.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 7.

In addition to the time and manner in which the Messiah's kingdom should, according to this prophecy, arise, the world was prepared to discover it by

II. Its greatness

It was to have the pre-eminence above all other kingdoms in respect of

1. Power

[All the monarchies referred to by the prophet were great and powerful; but this far excelled them all—The stone cut out without hands fell upon the feet of the image which were of iron and clay, and broke the whole image in pieces; intimating that the kingdom of Christ should prevail over the Roman empire together with the other monarchies which were comprehended in it: all the powers of the world were to be only “as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor,” before it—We are not to understand by this, that Christianity is adverse to human governments, (for it tells us that “the powers that be are ordained of God, and that we should be subject to them, not merely through fear, but for conscience sake”) but that it will bring down every power which sets up itself against the Lord and his Christ—This was further represented in the vision by “the stone becoming a mountain, and this mountain filling the earth”—Christianity is to prevail over the whole earth—The idolatries of Pagan Rome yielded to the sublimer principles of the gospel; and the superstitions of antichrist, which for a long season obscured divine truth, have fallen, and shall in due time vanish before its light and influence—Nor shall the authority of Christ extend, like that of earthly monarchs, merely over the bodies of men; it shall reach unto their souls, and “bring into subjection the very thoughts and desires of their hearts”—There shall not be one disaffected subject in his whole empire: the happiness of all his people shall be bound up in their prince, whose will shall be their only law, and whose honour their only aim—]

2. Continuance

[All other kingdoms have fallen, and shall fall; nor can the best constituted governments maintain their stability beyond the time allotted them in the divine counsels—But the kingdom of Christ “shall stand for ever:” his power shall “never be transferred to other hands;” nor shall any revolutions shake the foundations of his throne—“He shall put down all rule and all authority and power, and reign till all his

his enemies are become his footstool^e—The precise mode of administering his kingdom will indeed terminate when there shall be no more subjects upon earth to govern: but the kingdom itself will exist in heaven to all eternity, when it shall be delivered up into the Father's hands, and God shall be all in all^f—The perpetuity of this kingdom was afterwards revealed to Daniel, with some additional circumstances indeed, in a vision similar to that before us—The four monarchies appeared to him as four great beasts; the last of which had ten horns^g, corresponding with the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image, and intimating that ten smaller powers should grow out of that fourth monarchy, all of which should in due season fall before the kingdom of Christ, which was then to become universal in its extent, and everlasting in its continuance^h—]

APPLICATION

1. To the enemies of Christ's kingdom

[Persons may be enemies of Christ's kingdom either by denying the truth of Christianity, or by resisting its influence—But whether we be professed infidels or merely nominal Christians, the subject before us is highly proper for our consideration—Whence came this marvellous correspondence between the predictions and the accomplishment of them, if Christianity be not of divine original? was it not established at the very time that was fixed in this prophecy, and has it not prevailed, not only without the aid of human authority, but in direct opposition to all the power and policy of the confederate world?—And if it have broken in pieces so many adverse powers, and “made them even as the chaff of the summer threshing-floors,” shall you withstand it with impunity?—Our Lord, in reference to this very passage, has assured us, that “on whomsoever this stone shall fall it shall grind him to powderⁱ”—But remember, it is not a feigned or forced submission that is required of you: Christ reigns over a willing people, and must be enthroned in their hearts—Let such be his influence over you—Let “every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ be put down;” and let his law be your rule, his service your delight, and his honour your aim—]

2. To the friends and subjects of Christ

[As Christianity has not prevailed in the world without much opposition, so neither will it gain a complete ascendancy over the heart without many conflicts—But should any one despond because his adversaries are mighty? We need only look at the prevalence of Christianity in the world, and we

^e 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25.

^f Ibid.

^g Dan. vii. 3—7.

^h Dan. vii. 14.

ⁱ Matt. xxi. 43, 44. See also, Isai. lx. 12.

we may see what shall be accomplished in our hearts—Are we destitute of any power in ourselves? Be it so: yet the stone which was cut out without hands, and became a great mountain, shall crush our enemies, and bring our inmost souls into subjection to Christ—If the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against the church at large, neither shall they against the weakest member of it—If the greatest empires have yielded to the influence of the gospel, so shall also the most inveterate lusts—Let Christians then lift up their heads with joy; their conflicts may be severe, but their victory is certain—]

CCXV. THE FRAILTY OF MAN AND IMMUTABILITY OF THE GOSPEL.

Isai. xl. 6—8. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

GOD doeth according to his own will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. When his time was come for the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, in vain did Pharaoh labour to retain them. Thus the prophet was inspired to declare the redemption of the Jews from Babylon, and the still greater redemption of the world from sin and Satan, in spite of all endeavours which might be used to thwart the divine purpose. This seems to be the immediate scope of the words before us. But they may also be taken as a general declaration respecting *the instability of every thing human, and the immutability of God's word.*

I. The instability of every thing human

The comparison of man to grass is very frequent in the scriptures; and it affords a just description of

1. Our temporal comforts

[The grass in the early spring adorns and beautifies the face of nature; but, when parched by a burning sun or an eastern blast, it soon withers and decays: in the same manner the beauty and strength of youth are soon turned to weakness and deformity: the affluence and honour of the rich is quickly changed to degradation and want: and all our goodly fabrics
of

of ease and happiness are soon demolished. St. James illustrates this truth by the very comparison in the text ^a: and as Job experienced it in the days of old, so in every age may numerous instances be found of such vicissitudes.]

2. Our spiritual comforts

[God is pleased to give rich consolation to his people: and, while they enjoy it, their faces are made, as it were, to shine, as the face of Moses did, when he descended from the holy mount. But these comforts are often of short continuance. When Peter thought of building tabernacles to protract his happiness, a cloud immediately overshadowed him, and he was called down to renew his conflicts with the world ^b. When David fancied his mountain so strong that he should never be moved, God hid his face from him and he was troubled ^c. Thus it is also with all the people of God; whose manifold changes in this respect may well be compared with the diversified scenes of nature under the influence of kindly showers, or malignant winds ^d.]

3. Our very life itself

[In the midst of health we promise ourselves years to come: but, when God withdraws our breath, we instantly return to our native dust. Some look more gay and possess more "goodliness" than others; but they are only as the "flower of the field," which cannot survive the grass, and not unfrequently falls before it. In this view the inspired writers describe our state ^e; and both observation and experience attest the truth of their representations: we must all confess, in the language of the text, "*Surely, the people is grass.*"]

But while every thing human is thus frail and transient, we have a firm foundation whereon to stand, namely,

II. The immutability of God's word

The "word of God" here spoken of, may be understood as relating to *Christ*, who is often called by this name, and whose immutability is mentioned by the Psalmist in this very view ^f. But St. Peter informs us that the prophet spake of the gospel salvation ^g. Now

This "word" contains the most important and comfortable truths

[There is no want, which it is not able to supply, no disorder, for which it does not prescribe a remedy: It proclaims health

^a Jam. i. 9—11.

^c Ps. xxx. 7.

^e Job xiv. 1, 2. Ps. xc. 3—6. Ps. ciii. 15, 16.

^f Ps. cii. 11, 12, 26, 27.

^b Mark ix. 5, 7, 14.

^d Ps. cii. 2—4.

^g 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

health to the sick, sight to the blind, liberty to the captives, and life to the dead. So extensive are its invitations and promises, that there is not an human being excluded from its provisions, nor is there any limit to the blessings which it will impart. It assures us, that sins of a crimson die may become white as snow; that the most heavy-laden soul may obtain rest; and that none, who come to Jesus, shall on any account be cast out^h.]

Nor is it a small excellence in these truths, that they are as immutable as God himself

[How vain were the attempts of men and devils to stop the progress of the gospel, and to make void the declarations of God respecting it! Equally vain shall be every endeavour to invalidate the promises which he has made to the believing penitent. Has he said, that "all manner of sin shall be forgiven; that he will cleanse us from all our filthiness and from all our idols; and that, where he has begun the good work, he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ?" We may rest assured that he will fulfil his word: for "he is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent." But it may be said, "Though God changeth not, yet we change, and therefore may forfeit our interest in the promises." True; if God should leave us, we not only *may*, but most undoubtedly *shall*, both fall and perish. But God has said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may adopt the confident declaration of St. Paul, "I know in whom I have believed, that is able to keep that which I have committed to him." We must be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Then, though difficulties may arise, and appear for a while wholly insurmountable, they shall surely be overcome: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and we shall see the salvation of God."]

We may LEARN from hence

1. The folly of seeking our rest in earthly things

[The injunction given to the prophet to "cry," and to proclaim aloud that "all flesh is grass," and *the frequent repetition of this comparison*, are strong intimations of the extreme vanity of every thing here below. And who amongst us has not found that the enjoyments he fondly anticipated, have either eluded his grasp, or deceived his expectation? Whatever then be our comforts in life, let us not set our hearts upon them, but "so use the world as not abusing it, knowing that the fashion thereof passeth away."]

2. The

^h Isai. i. 18. Matt. xi. 28. John vi. 37.

2. The wisdom of embracing the gospel salvation

[They who trust in the word of God are sure of never being disappointed. However high their expectations are raised, they shall never be ashamed. The stronger their faith, the more abiding will be their comfort. Besides, their enjoyments, instead of cloying, will become more and more delightful; and, instead of bringing with them many inseparable ills, will produce nothing but good to their souls. But that which most of all must endear the gospel to them is, that their happiness will then be consummated, when they, whose comforts were of an earthly nature, will want even a drop of water to cool their tongue. Let the word of God then be precious to our souls. Let Christ, as revealed in it, be the object of our faith, and hope, and love. Let us embrace the promises, assured that they shall all be fulfilled; and let us tremble at the threatenings, knowing that they shall all be executed. Thus shall we be proof against the temptations of the world, and shall possess an eternity of glory, when the lovers of this present world will lie down in everlasting burnings.]

CCXVI. THE DESTRUCTION OF POPERY.

Dan. vii. 9, 10. *I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued, and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.*

WHILE God exercises his sovereignty, he displays also his wisdom, in revealing his mind to man—As we may trace on many occasions a peculiar propriety in the time and manner of making known his will, so we may observe a kind of suitableness in the revelations themselves to those to whom they were made—The succession of four great empires had been made known to Nebuchadnezzar under the figure of a colossal image composed of various metals^a; and the same is revealed to Daniel by a vision of four dreadful beasts: the propriety of these

^a Dan. ii. 31—45.

these different representations is evident ; for the mind of that haughty monarch was engrossed with the love of earthly grandeur ; whereas the humbler mind of Daniel would view great conquerors rather in the light of ferocious beasts, eager to desolate the human race—In Daniel's vision also many things were added relative to the church of God, which, though of infinite importance in his eyes, would have been of small moment to the king of Babylon—

It is to the church of Christ, and not to the general judgment, that the words which we have read, refer—We shall

I. Explain them

The terms themselves scarcely admit of elucidation or enlargement

[Nothing can be more majestic than this description of God's coming to judgment—First “the thrones are *set down*”^b, and “the Ancient of days,” the eternal incomprehensible Jehovah, with Christ as his assessor, takes his seat—The august appearance of the Judge, “clothed in a garment white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool,” denotes his unsearchable wisdom that penetrates the deepest secrets, and his unsullied integrity as discoverable in all his decisions—His throne is compared to a triumphal chariot, whose seat and wheels are of fire, and from which issues a stream of fire to destroy those whom his justice shall condemn—“Myriads of angels minister to him” as the willing executioners of his decrees, and “innumerable multitudes stand before him” to receive their sentence from his mouth—“The judgment being thus set, the books are opened;” as well the book of his remembrance, wherein the actions of all were written, as the book of his law, whereby they are to be judged—]

That which more particularly needs to be explained is, *the ends for which this judgment is instituted*

[*The destruction of Antichrist* is the first event to which this description refers—The prophet directs our attention, not to the general judgment, but to a particular judgment which shall be instituted for the punishment of a blasphemous, persecuting, and presumptuous power—Who that power is we cannot reasonably doubt—The little horn spoken of in the context will appear evidently to be the Papal Hierarchy, if we consider how exactly the characters of that antichristian power

^b So the words “*cast down*” should rather be rendered.

power are described by the prophet—It rose after that the Roman empire had been divided into ten smaller kingdoms; it reduced under its dominion three of those kingdoms^c: and from the time that it had gained this ascendancy, has never ceased to persecute the saints, and to assume to itself the unalienable prerogatives of the most high God^d—St. Paul's account also of the man of sin corresponds exactly with this, and confirms this application of the prophecy in the strongest manner^e—

The enlargement of Christ's kingdom is another event, to which the judgment before us has respect—The connexion between this and the destruction of popery is very strongly marked by the prophet: repeatedly in this chapter does he unite two events^f; teaching us thereby to expect assuredly, that as they are united in God's purpose, so shall they be also in their accomplishment—

As to the time when these things shall come to pass, we know that it shall be 1260 years from the time of Antichrist; but we must wait for the event, before we can positively say from what precise period the numeration of those years must commence—Partial checks has popery already received—Indeed, at the Reformation, and more especially in recent events, has its throne been shaken to the very foundations; and, as at the Reformation, so at this time also, is there (though in a less degree) a correspondent increase of zeal to spread the knowledge of Christ^g—But when that idolatrous power shall be destroyed, then shall “the kingdoms of the world speedily become the kingdoms of the Lord and his Christ”—]

Not to rest in a mere historical account of these prophecies, we shall

II. Deduce from them some important observations

We might not unprofitably make some remarks on the sublimity of the prophetic writings: but waving these, we would observe

1. Men

^c The Exarchate of Ravenna, the kingdom of the Lombards, and the state of Rome.

^d Who is ignorant of their claims to infallibility, and of power to dispense both pardons and indulgences? Who knows not how they have set up their authority above that of God himself, changed the institutions of his sacramental supper, prohibited to their clergy the very first ordinance of God and nature, and dispensed with every obligation human and divine?

^e 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4, 8, 9.

^f Ver. 11—14. and ver 26, 27.

^g This alludes to the number of missionaries lately sent out to the islands in the South Sea.

1. Men are only the executioners of divine justice

[There are various ways in which God punishes sin—The crimes of individuals are brought into a court of judicature, and animadverted upon by the civil magistrate, who, in that view, is the minister, yea, the representative of God himself^b—When whole communities offend, God commissions the sword, or pestilence, or famine, to chastise them—He puts the cup of his wrath into their hands, and makes them drink it to the very dregs—As the blasphemies of Antichrist will in due season bring down the vengeance of God upon the papal hierarchy, so whatever nation abandons itself to sin, it shall surely be visited for its iniquity: God will send forth their enemies, who, as “the rod of his anger, and the staff of his indignation,” shall avenge his righteous cause—Let us then view our enemies as *his* sword, and we shall see the surest way of obtaining its restoration to the scabbard—]

2. The judgments which now desolate the earth, will, in all probability, tend in the issue to the advancement of Christ's kingdom

[We have seen how strongly the connexion between the destruction of popery, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom is marked in the prophecy before us—Nor is it difficult to shew how the one event naturally tends to accelerate the other—That idolatrous church has fettered the minds of her votaries, and shut up all the avenues to truth: she keeps the scriptures locked up in an unknown tongue, and imposes the dogmas of men as of more weight than the declarations of God—But when her authority shall cease, men shall think for themselves, and, by “searching the scriptures daily,” be brought to the knowledge and enjoyment of Christ—

We are not however to imagine that the end sanctifies the means: for, as the Assyrians, while executing the divine judgments on the Jews, sought nothing but the gratification of their own pride and ambition, for which God afterwards punished them severely, so nothing is further from the mind of our enemies than to accomplish the will of Heaven: and, no doubt, when they shall have finished the work which God has determined to execute by them, he will reckon with them for their pride and blasphemy, their cruelty and rapacity—Nor ought we to suspend our exertions in opposing our enemies under the idea that we are fighting against God: for, it is the *revealed will*, and not the *secret intentions*, of the Deity, that we are to regard as the rule of our conduct; and our duty both to God and our country evidently requires that we should defend all that is dear to us as men and Christians—As it would be
our

^b Rom. xiii. 4.

our duty to exert ourselves to the utmost to alleviate the pressure of famine, pestilence, or any other judgment, so, without presuming to pry into the decrees of heaven, we should withstand to the utmost the avowed enemies of all civil order and religious liberty—

Nevertheless, while we groan under the evils which God is inflicting on us, we may derive some consolation from the thought, that God can bring good out of evil, and overrule our distresses for the extension of Christ's kingdom throughout the world—]

3. Present judgments, by whomsoever inflicted, should lead our thoughts to the judgment of the great day

[Do we behold a criminal standing at the bar to receive a sentence of condemnation or acquittal from an earthly judge? Let it bring to our minds that we ourselves shall shortly stand before the tribunal of our God, whose award shall fix our state in endless happiness or irremediable misery—Do we survey the desolations which are spread throughout the world? Let them teach us, that sinners will not be spared because they are many, but be adjudged to that particular state for which they are severally meet—There is indeed this difference observable, that *here* the righteous are involved in the same judgments as the wicked; whereas *hereafter* they will be selected from among them, and receive the portion allotted to them by their heavenly Father: but the wicked, how numerous soever they may be, will have the vials of God's wrath poured out upon them to the uttermost—Even now we see whole cities and kingdoms desolated, and myriads swept away by the besom of destruction: how much more then will this be the case in that day which is expressly appointed for the display of God's righteous judgment! Surely if but a Noah or a Lot be faithful to their God, only a Noah or a Lot shall be saved: but "they who forget God," even though they should consist of whole nations, yea, of "all the nations" upon earth, "shall be turned into hell," and be overwhelmed in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone¹—May we all be led seriously to "consider this, lest God pluck us away, and there be none to deliver us!"—]

¹ Ps. ix. 17.

CCXVII. THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

Zech. viii. 20—23. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord,*

and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

IF we did not see that the generality of Christians, with the scriptures in their hands, are yet ignorant of the plainest and most fundamental doctrines of our religion, we should wonder how the Jews, with the sacred oracles before them, could be such strangers to God's design of bringing the Gentiles into his church. If there were no other passage, in all the inspired volume, relating to the subject, besides that which we have now read, they would have had abundant reason to expect that glorious event.

But the prophecy before us, however fulfilled in part in the apostolic and succeeding ages, is yet to receive, at a future period, a more complete accomplishment. In unfolding its meaning, we shall be led to consider

I. The conversion of the Gentiles

To human appearance, it must be granted, this event is very improbable: but

It is certain

[It is an event foretold from the earliest ages by Moses^a and the prophets^b; and we are confirmed in our expectation of it by Christ^c, and his apostles^d.]

It will, however, be sudden

[There will probably be no more prospect of its arrival, than there was of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon a little time before it took effect. "A nation shall then, as it were, be born in a day^e." "As soon as the people hear of Christ, they shall obey him^f." No sooner shall his standard be erected, than they shall flock to it in crowds, "like doves to their windows^g." Like persons eager for some great and unexpected good, they shall "lay hold of the skirt" of him, who they think can aid them in the attainment of it. Yea, so vast and sudden will be the accession of converts to the church, that the places appropriated to divine worship shall not be
able

^a Deut. xxxii. 21. with Rom. x. 19, 20.

^b Ps. lxxii. 8—11. Isai. xlix. and lx.

^c Luke xxi. 24.

^d Rom. xv. 8—12. and xi. 25.

^e Isai. lxvi. 8.

^f Ps. xviii. 43, 44.

^g Isai. lx. 2, 3, 8.

able to contain them, and the people of God themselves shall be filled with wonder and astonishment ^h.]

It will also be universal

["All the ends of the world are given to Christ as his possession ⁱ." And in that day "many and strong nations" shall unite themselves to the Lord; and men shall fear him from the rising to the setting sun ^k." "All shall know him, from the least of them even to the greatest ^l." All shall be righteous ^m: even the most ignorant countrymen shall be consecrated to the Lord ⁿ. None, or next to none, shall remain in an heathenish unconverted state ^o. The knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as universally as the waters cover the channel of the sea ^p.]

Together with this assurance of the event itself, the text further sets before us

II. The way in which it will be manifested

Conversion, wherever it exists, uniformly produces the effects mentioned in the text

1. A cordial delight in God's ordinances

[A proud Pharisee will go to the temple as well, and perhaps as often, as a repenting publican: but he never can find *delight* in the worship of God. Prayer is a task, that he performs either from necessity, or with a view to establish a righteousness of his own. But the true convert rejoices in opportunities of approaching God both in public and in private ^q— — There will indeed be many seasons when he will find his mind lamentably indisposed for holy exercises: but, when he is in a proper frame, his joy is in God alone ^r.

Nor will any true Christian be satisfied to serve God alone: when once he has tasted the benefits of communion with God, he will desire to bring all he can to a participation of his bliss ^s. Nor will he readily be put off with vain excuses; he knows the danger of procrastination; and therefore says, Come, "let us go *speedily*, and seek the Lord:" yea, to give more efficacy to his advice, he is glad to lead the way ^t, and to profit others by his example, as well as by his precepts.

This will be an universally prevalent disposition in the latter day ^u; and it will assuredly prevail, wherever the grace of God is received in truth.]

2. A zealous

^h Isai. xlix. 18—22.

ⁱ Jer. xxxi. 34.

ⁿ Zech. xiv. 20, 21.

^p Hab. ii. 14.

^r Rom. v. 11.

^t "I will go also."

ⁱ Ps. ii. 8.

^k Mal. i. 11.

^m Isai. lx. 21.

^o Ib. ver. 21.

^q Ps. cxlviii. 14. Ps. xlii. 1, 2. 1 John i. 3.

^s John i. 41, 42, 45. Song i. 4.

^u Mich. iv. 1, 2.

2. A zealous attachment to his people

[A person truly converted to God can no longer associate with those, who would turn him from the paths of righteousness^x. He seeks rather those who will aid him in his journey heaven-ward. He sees that God is with his people, “comforting them with his presence^y,” and “blessing them with all spiritual blessings^z.” He therefore desires to cast in his lot with them^a; he “takes the Lord’s people, as it were, by the skirt, saying, I will go with you;” and, with Moses, accounts it better to renounce all the vanities of the world, and to “suffer affliction with the Lord’s people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season^b.” In this choice, he is not instigated by fear, as the heathen were in the days of Esther^c, but from a firm persuasion that God is with his church, and that there is no solid happiness to be enjoyed but in connexion with it^d.]

This subject affords ample matter

1. For reproof

[With all our profession of Christianity, the generality never once in all their lives have manifested such a disposition as is described above. We frequently say to each other, Let us go to this or that amusement; but never, “Let us go speedily and seek the Lord.” On the contrary, though frequently and earnestly exhorted by the ministers of God, we cannot even be persuaded to seek the Lord for ourselves. What resemblance then is there between such persons, and the Christians of the latter day? Let us know that to call ourselves Christians, while we are wholly destitute of Christian principles and Christian habits, is a fond and fatal delusion.]

2. For encouragement

[God is with his church at this time, as well as in the days of old^e: and his people can testify, that it is well with those who seek his face^f. Behold then, we say to all, as Moses to his father-in-law, “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: and it shall be, if ye go with us, *yea, it shall be*, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will he do to you^g.” Let the day then, the blessed day, commence amongst us, when that prophecy shall be accomplished, “The children of Israel shall come together, going, and weeping, they shall go and seek the

^x 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

^z Eph. i. 3.

^b Heb. xi. 24—26.

^c Esth. viii. 17.

^e Matt. xxviii. 20.

^f See Numb. x. 29, 32.

^y John xiv. 21, 22.

^a Ps. xvi. 3. Isai. xlv. 5.
with Acts ii. 41.

^d 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

^f Eccl. viii. 12. with
2 Chron. xxvi. 5.

the Lord their God: they shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten ^h."]

^h Jer. l. 4, 5.

CCXVIII. THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Hos. iii. 5. *Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.*

KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world; and whatever he has predetermined in his eternal counsels shall surely be fulfilled. Often indeed is the execution of his purposes delayed till unbelievers begin to think that his word has failed of its accomplishment: but "in the evening time it shall be light:" and when the obstacles to his will seem almost insurmountable, he will glorify himself in fulfilling it beyond all human expectation. Thus he acted, when, according to his promise, he brought the Israelites out of Egypt. He suffered them to be detained till the very last day that they could be consistently with the truth of his promise; and then, when the Israelites themselves were almost reduced to despair, he brought them out with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm. Thus also will he act yet once more towards that chosen people. They are now dispersed almost beyond the hope of conversion to God. But there is a period when they shall as universally, and perhaps too as suddenly, commit themselves to the government of Christ, as ever they did to the direction of Moses; nor is it improbable that they will yet again inhabit that very land, from which they have been driven for their iniquities.

To elucidate this subject we shall consider

I. The event foretold in this prophecy

The whole of the gospel dispensation is often called "the latter days:" but here the expression refers to what is called by many, The Millennium, or the time when all

the kingdoms of the world shall be converted to Christ. In that day,

The Jews shall universally return to God through Christ

[When the ten tribes revolted from the house of David under Jeroboam, they established idolatry in opposition to the worship of the true God, and set up kings of their own in opposition to those who sat on the throne of David. But in about two hundred and fifty years they were carried captive to Assyria; and from that time to the present hour they have had no king of their own; and have been deprived of all opportunities of worshipping God either according to the Mosaic ritual, or according to their own idolatrous superstitions^a. However they are not wholly and finally abandoned of their God: for, when his Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh, they shall take the lead in turning unto God^b, and shall voluntarily appoint the Lord Jesus Christ as their head^c. This blessed truth is abundantly confirmed in scripture^d: and the accomplishment of it will display in a most stupendous manner the unsearchable riches of God's wisdom and goodness^e.]

In turning to God they shall be peculiarly influenced by the divine goodness

[The sanctions of the Jewish law were principally of a penal nature, and calculated to beget a servile spirit. Even Moses himself at the giving of the law exceedingly trembled and quaked^f. But, as formerly they feared the Lord and his judgments, so in the latter day they will "fear the Lord and his goodness^g:" they will marvel at his kindness in choosing their nation in the days of old; and at his patience in bearing with them during their long departure from him; and, above all, at his mercy and faithfulness in bringing them back into his church, and manifesting to them again the tokens of his love. With these considerations they will be overwhelmed; and, constrained by his love, will become patterns of all righteousness.]

While we contemplate this stupendous event, let us improve it by considering

II. Some instructive lessons which it affords us

We may learn from it

1. Wherein

^a Ver. 4. The "Teraphim" seem to have been images to which they resorted for the purposes of divination.

^b Zech. viii. 23.

^c Hos. i. 11.

^d Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. and xxxvii. 21, 22, 24.

^e Rom. xi. 33.

^f Heb. xii. 21.

^g Isai. ii. 2.

1. Wherein true conversion consists

[There are two leading points comprising the whole of conversion, and absolutely inseparable from it; these are, a returning unto God through Christ, and a serving of God from a principle of love. We have seen, that the conversion of the Jews will be eminently distinguished in both these respects: and a work of grace is universally characterized by the same marks. Let us then enquire, have we returned to God *in* Christ, and to God *through* Christ, relying wholly on the mediation and intercession of that once crucified, but now exalted Saviour? Are we also willing to put ourselves under his government, as we are to experience his salvation; not accounting any of his commandments grievous, but yielding to them that cheerful obedience, which is the genuine offspring of faith and love? It is for this end that God's perfections are manifested ^h, his promises revealed ⁱ, his blessings given ^k. And if the glory of the Lord have ever risen upon us, our hearts will cherish this holy fear, and experience this devout enlargement^l.]

2. That none are in so desperate a state but that they may yet be converted to God

[Certainly the state of the Jews is, to all appearance, as desperate as that of any human being; so obstinately do they adhere to their own delusions. But they shall, like the returning tide, "flow up to the mountain of the Lord's house," as soon as ever the attractive influences of divine grace shall operate upon them^m. Let none then despair of others, as though they were too far gone from God; or of themselves, as though they were too blind, and too obdurate. The way of mercy is open unto all; nor are any gone beyond the hope of redemption, but those who are summoned into the invisible world. We say not indeed that a person's day of grace cannot be passed, while yet he remains in this world: but no man can be sure that he himself, or that any other individual, is thus given up by God; and therefore every one has encouragement to return to God through Christ. There is forgiveness with God that he may be feared. And Christ will be the head of all those who commit themselves to his government. Let us then "fear the Lord and his goodness;" let every instance of it, whether temporal or spiritual, be an incentive to us to love and serve him: and let us seek, each of us in our day, to become monuments of that grace, which will hereafter be so gloriously displayed in the conversion of the whole world.]

^h Exod. xxxiv. 6, 8. and Ps. xxx. 4.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^k Heb. xii. 28.

^l Isai. lx. 1, 5.

^m Isai. ii. 2. Mic. iv. 1.

CCXIX. THE MILLENNIUM.

Isai. xi. 9. *The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

THE generality of mankind ascribe a far greater degree of moral influence to civilization, than the state of the heathen world in its most refined ages will justify. We are willing however to admit, that some good effects are to be traced to this cause. But to renew and sanctify the heart is far beyond its power: this is the province of religion, even of that religion which is revealed to us in the gospel. The prophet has been describing in most beautiful language the change that shall one day be wrought on the face of the earth; and he traces it to the propagation of the gospel, and the extension of divine knowledge, as its true and only source; “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,” &c. *for* “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.”

In these words he shews us

I. Wherein true religion consists

It cannot be more justly or comprehensively described than in these words, “the knowledge of the Lord”

[Many indeed even of those who call themselves Christians suppose that religion is altogether comprehended in doing to others as we would be done unto. But, though it must be acknowledged that this is an important branch, yet is it far from being the whole, since it relates only to the duties of the second table, and leaves out all the duties which we owe to God. We must rather say, that the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus is the sum and substance of religion; because in this is contained that vital energy, which puts forth itself in all the fruits of righteousness. It is in this light that the scriptures continually represent it. The prophet Isaiah says, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many^a.” Jeremiah cautions us against “glorying in any thing, but in the understanding and knowing of God” as displaying justice and mercy in the person of Christ^b. Our Lord himself affirms that, “to know God, and Jesus Christ as sent by him, is life eternal c.” And St. Paul, in his nervous mode of expression, “counts

^a Isai. liii. 11.

^b Jer. ix. 23, 24.

^c John xvii. 1.

“ counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord ^d.”]

But by “ the knowledge of the Lord ” we must of necessity understand a *practical* and *experimental* knowledge of him.

[Were a speculative knowledge sufficient, Balaam and even the devils themselves might vindicate their claim to religion; since *he* could boast, that he “ knew the knowledge of the Almighty,” and indeed prophesied of Christ in very exalted terms^e; and *they* could say to Christ, “ We know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God ^f.” But the only knowledge that can be considered as constituting religion, is that which the apostle so emphatically described and so earnestly desired; “ I count all things but dung, ~~that~~ I may win Christ, and know him in the power of his resurrection, in the fellowship of his sufferings, and in a conformity to his death ^g.” St. John, with a simplicity peculiar to himself, confirms this truth, saying, “ Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments: he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him ^h.”]

Painful as the general want of this religion is at present, we shall be comforted in considering

II. In what manner it shall hereafter prevail

The comparison, which the prophet makes between the diffusion of true religion and the waters of the unfathomable and boundless ocean, leads us naturally to observe, that the knowledge of the Lord in that day will be

1. Universal in its extent

[Improbable as this event may appear, there is scarcely any other so frequently and so plainly foretold in the prophetic writings as this. David, in a Psalm where he not only speaks of Christ, but even personates him, says, “ All the ends of the earth shall remember themselves and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him; for the kingdom is the Lord’s, and he is the governor among the nationsⁱ :” and, in another Psalm, which is altogether on this subject, he says, “ Christ shall have dominion from sea to sea; all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him.”]

^d Phil. iii. 8.

^e Num. xxiv. 16, 17.

^f Luke iv. 34.

^g Phil. iii. 10.

^h 1 John ii. 3, 4.

ⁱ Ps. xxii. 27.

him^k." To cite what Isaiah speaks to this effect, would be to repeat whole chapters^l. Jeremiah, confirming at the same time the truth we have before insisted on, that true religion consists in the knowledge of the Lord, says, "In that day they shall no more teach every man his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest of them, saith the Lord^m." Daniel assures us, that "the kingdom which God himself will then erect, shall break in pieces all adverse powers, and fill the whole earthⁿ." Zechariah tells us, that "Holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the very bells of the horses; that the most common things in every place shall be consecrated, as it were, to God in their daily use; and that there shall then be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts^o." The apostles also, and our Lord himself, add their testimony; St. Paul affirms, not only that "the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in," but that "the Jews shall be again ingrafted on their own olive-tree^p:" and our Lord says, that all, Jews and Gentiles, "shall be one fold under one shepherd^q:" and St. John, passing over the intermediate space of time, represents the angels in heaven as already rejoicing in the accomplishment of this event, and saying, "The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever^r."]

2. Deep in its degree

[The knowledge which the Jews enjoyed was very contracted: ours, since the completion of the canon of scripture, is considerably enlarged; insomuch that the least of true Christians is, in respect of knowledge, greater than even John the Baptist, who was himself the greatest of all the prophets^s. But in that day the light will shine far brighter; and the knowledge of all true converts will be, in comparison of ours, as the ocean's depth to a shallow stream. This also is declared with very abundant evidence in the prophetic writings. "The vail that is spread over all nations, is then to be taken away^t." Nor are any, whose eyes are opened, to have an indistinct view of the truth: the prophet Isaiah says, "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken; the heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly^u." In another place the prophet supposes
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^k Ps. lxxii. 8, 11, 17.

^m Jer. xxxi. 34.

^p Rom. xi. 24, 25.

^s Matt. xi. 11.

^l See 49th and 60th chapters.

ⁿ Dan. ii. 44.

^q John x. 16.

^t Isai. xxv. 7.

^o Zech. xiv. 20, 21.

^r Rev. xi. 15.

^u Isai. xxxii. 3, 4.

men to have received a stroke or wound upon their eyes, and that, by the healing of that wound, a vast increase of light shall shine into their minds; "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound^x." To mention no more passages, the same prophet represents the saints in that day as seeing Christ, not as in a shadow, like the Jews, nor as in a mirror, like us, but eye to eye, and face to face; "Then shall they see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion^y."

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1. What a glorious period will the millennium be!

[The time referred to in the text is often called the millennium, because it is to last a thousand years. And how blessed will be the state of the world during that period! How will the whole face of the earth be changed! The description of it in the preceding context, figurative as it is, will be almost literally accomplished: men, savage as the most ferocious animals, will be transformed into meek and lowly followers of the Lamb. No more wars, no more enslaving of our fellow creatures, no more public feuds or private animosities; all will be love; "there will be none to hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain^z." O that the day were already come! O that "God would hasten it in his time!" But, if we cannot be privileged to see it, let us at least help it forward by every means in our power: let us diffuse the savour of the knowledge of Christ in every place; and exert all our influence to send the light of the gospel to the heathen world, till "Ethiopia herself shall stretch out her hands unto God."]

2. How thankful should we be for that little knowledge, with which God, in his mercy, has favoured us!

[Surely God has not left himself without witness amongst us, but "has given testimony to the word of his grace," and evinced its quickening, transforming efficacy. Doubtless there are some amongst us, whose dispositions and habits were once as adverse to the gospel, as the wolf is to a lamb, or the leopard to a kid, who now harmoniously unite with the saints of God, and approve themselves to the world as new creatures. Till they knew the Lord, nothing could effectually tame their spirits, much less transform them into the divine image: but since the light of divine truth has shined into their hearts, they have

^x Isai. xxx. 26.

^y Isai. lii. 8.

^z Ver. 6—9.

have enjoyed the peace, and exercised the love, and maintained the purity of God's dear children. Let such then be thankful for the distinguished mercies vouchsafed unto them: let them remember that "all things, which pertain unto life and godliness, are communicated to us through the knowledge of Christ^a;" and let them seek to "grow both in grace and knowledge," till from "beholding Christ only as in a glass darkly," they shall "see him as they are seen, and know him as they are known^b."]

^a 2 Pet. i. 3.

^b 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

END OF VOL. II.

